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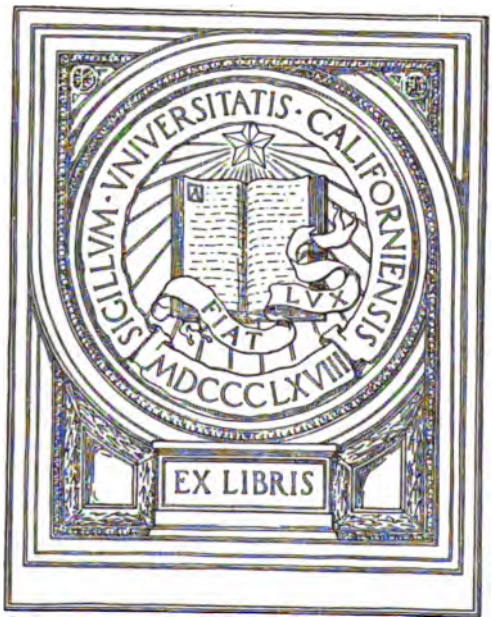
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VANISHING POINTS

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

BY

ALICE BROWN

"You cannot see beyond the vanishing point.
True. But take one step and you see more.
And so on—to Infinity."

ECKERMANN

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VANISHING POINTS

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THE MAN IN THE CLOISTER

THE Littletons had an evening at home, because Aunt Harriet Webb, from Overland, was making her annual winter visit, and it became not only a point of honor to stand by and entertain a comfortable old lady to whom all city amusements were not plain sailing, but a privilege as dearly prized as a new form of vaudeville.

Aunt Harriet had kept a boarding-house at Overland in the middle years which were now slipping past her, and it was there the Littletons, being then persons of a modest income, had spent several summers and formed for her an attachment which they never, in their present flourishing days, permitted to languish. Mr. Littleton, who was now a white-haired autocrat of civic affairs, and his wife, a faithful patroness of music and the kindred arts whenever her name was sought, had not changed with the gilding of their responsibilities, except perhaps to be more kind, more constant in remembering their leaner time and the companions who had helped to make it fruitful. When Aunt Harriet came, they always felt they were returning to a delightful state of indolence, because their engagements were immediately curtailed, save such as Aunt Harriet liked to share.

Mr. Littleton read his evening paper and sometimes sat by with a volume of Dickens until he yawningly concluded it was time to go to bed, and his wife crocheted or even knitted faithfully to the tune of their old friend's chat. To-night the unvaried programme was continuing, except that Ruth Nutter, Mr. Littleton's private secretary, was established there, smiling now and then as she was addressed, and pasting book-plates into a pile of volumes from England; and Sedgwick, the Littletons' grandson, corrugated with reflection on social problems, was frowning into the fire and contributing nothing whatever to conversational interchange.

Aunt Harriet, a short, stout, very neat old lady with smooth hair dressed in the fashion of the sixties and a cashmere dress she had made herself according to a never-dying ideal, looked benevolently up from her knitting one or twice, in a lapse of conversation, to consider the younger man and woman and wonder over them in a voiceless way. It seemed to her splendid to be of an age which is no age at all, and that these two were apparently ignoring their dowry. They ought to be laughing and sparkling at each other. The pretty girl, with her sweet, pale face, blue eyes, and soft black hair, and the distinction of her white hands against her black dress artfully subdued in style to the precise shade of her calling, ought to be conscious of her hereditary right as accorder of happiness, and the gaunt young man, with his brown eyes and working, sensitive mouth, should be gayly or even humbly suppliant. But no! These two inheritors of the world's promises might as well have been creatures of withered eld for all the battle of merry life between them. Once Sedg-

wick did say something about the Fabian Society, and Ruth lifted a quick, earnest glance and asked him if he had read a certain pamphlet on the plight of millionaires, and they went on talking about Shavianism, with a conjecture from Sedgwick as to the likelihood of Shaw's loving his fellow man. Aunt Harriet could make nothing of it all. It seemed to her "dreadful foolish talk". She sometimes had quick poetic fancies sprung from reminiscent glimpses at the pictures life had hung in her mind, and she suddenly laughed out. Littleton looked up from his volume of Dickens and smiled, out of a general benevolence, and his wife asked cozily:

"What is it?"

"I was kinder thinkin', that's all," said Aunt Harriet, in a tone subdued to her understanding of courtship's thraldom, "about them two over there. I was wonderin' if they'd ever been sleigh-ridin' together—or mayflowerin'."

Mrs. Littleton shook her head and smiled. She wished Sedgwick would marry Ruth, exquisite, in the eyes of them all, as the highest imagined type of girlhood, and sometimes it seemed to her he did look wistfully that way. But she had never entered his inner mind far enough to guess how little determined he was in his line of work, and consequently in the trend of settled affections. Sometimes it seemed to him it would be necessary to devote himself to the study of social conditions, and even to live among the poor. That, when he thought of Ruth, drew a black line through any hope he might have of the equable happiness of a wife and home. The world seemed to him so bad that

he dared not stretch out a hand toward the good of it for his own possession, and Ruth was, he knew, supremely good. But he was a poetic sort of fellow, with a real inner passion for writing, and when that came over him which he scathingly called individualism, he wrote by the ream and destroyed.

"I wonder what Shaw's done with all the money he got out of his plays?" Ruth was saying, with a little defiant lift of her head, knowing how unpopular her implication was destined to be.

"What business is it of ours?" Sedgwick inquired, frowning.

"It's our business, when a man sets himself up to teach and preach and jeer about money, to know whether he begins at home."

She darted a glance at him. Aunt Harriet, continuing her benevolent watch, decided, though the conversation was hidden from her, that Ruth was being a little naughtier than she usually dared, trying the ground as she went.

"What's he put it into?"

"Consols," said Mr. Littleton, sonorously, without looking up, and Ruth nodded gayly at the young man.

"Your grandfather knows," said she. "There!"

At that moment a visitor was announced. He came in hastily and shook hands all round with the lack of ceremony indicating frequent and informal meetings. He was a robust young curate with an ascetic mouth and eyes of a violet blue constituting his help and hindrance, because they induced large numbers of persons to accord him requests he seemed to have made, and generally involved him in the complexity of things.

He had, through these years of his energetic priesthood, kept his hand in Mr. Littleton's pocket, pulling it out, when occasion bade, to scatter the largess it extracted.

"I really had to come in," said he, in his rapid way. "The most extraordinary thing has happened."

Littleton laid down his glasses and ostentatiously brought out a pencil. He searched then in his pockets, the unlikely ones with the others, because that prolonged the pantomime.

"Where's my check-book?" he mused. "I wasn't ready for you, Bond. Do overlook it this once. I 'most always run to get it when I hear you in the hall, but you came in too quiet."

The curate could not smile over the obvious old joke, slight tax as it was on a certainty of largess. What he had been experiencing moved him too acutely. He could only repeat:

"The most extraordinary thing has happened."

"Do sit down, Mr. Bond," counselled his hostess, in her mollifying way. She had lowered her needle and wool, and crossed her pretty ringed hands upon them.

Bond obeyed her, but immediately rose again and stood leaning against the mantel. He evidently could not allow himself the semblance of comfort.

"It didn't seem such an exceptional case at first," he said, as if he began the story to the fire below him and not to them. "You know how cold it's been."

"Unheard of," supplied Littleton. "Zero for a week."

"Yes. Keep that in your mind while I tell you. A man has been sleeping all the week in the cloister."

"In the cloister?" Sedgwick demanded, in a loud voice, and Ruth looked up and lifted her eyebrows as a general interrogation.

"The cloister of the church," Mrs Littleton explained quietly to Aunt Harriet, who was regarding them in turn from a bemused wonderment.

"Ain't they allowed to?" she asked.

"It's a cold place," Sedgwick explained, rapidly, so that they might get on. "It's really like sleeping outdoors, on a piazza, on a porch. How did you find it out?"

This was to Bond, who continued, in the same strained way: "I came on him myself. I was going past. I stepped in there to—" he paused, seemed to sweep aside his momentary confusion over a betrayal, as a thing of no moment, and went on. "I went in to look at Orion through that fretwork. I stumbled on the fellow. There he was huddled up. I thought it was a dog."

"What did you do?" Ruth asked this. She and Sedgwick were estimating to the full the artistic value of the scene.

"Why," said Bond, as if he scorned himself, "I thought the man was drunk. I telephoned the police."

"Well, he was, wasn't he?" Littleton inquired, out of cool experience with a baffling world.

"Was what?"

"Drunk."

"No. He was done up, with hunger, cold, tramping about for days in search of work, and the hideousness of not getting it."

"Yes," said Sedgwick, in a quick staccato. "Yes! yes!"

Aunt Harriet looked at him in that perplexed way of hers, as if he with the rest of them—but he more than all the rest because he lived in a turmoil of theory from which he did not even briefly escape—made a new social condition for which Overland had not fitted her understanding.

"He'd come from the country," Bond was continuing to Littleton rather than to Sedgwick, since the older man seemed to be listening to the story as a story, with no preconceived idea that it might help or mar any social theory of his own. "He'd been in a chair factory."

"They get real good wages there," Aunt Harriet interpolated, as a simple item she was fitted to contribute.

Then Bond included her in the circle of his more direct gaze. "Yes," he agreed, "so he told me. But this winter they shut down work."

"It seems odd he shouldn't have had a nest-egg to fall back upon," Littleton advanced, from the shrewdness of his own ordered life.

"I dunno why," Aunt Harriet objected. "Mebbe he had a large family. Mebbe his wife's extravagant. You can't tell."

"He hasn't any family," said Bond. "His only brother and his brother's wife died last year. He's been turning in his wages to pay off the debts they left. They had long illnesses."

"Sounds like a man I used to know, lived down through the Gorge," said Aunt Harriet. "But there! he never'd been such a fool as to leave old New Hampshire to come pokin' off here where he'd be as lonesome as an owl in a bucket."

"Well," said Littleton, tapping his hand on the closed volume of Dickens, "what have you done for him? What do you propose doing?"

Bond looked at once as if he were hardening his heart, with a determination to lead the scientific life. He turned to Sedgwick, as being the one best fitted to uphold him in it.

"I've given him ten cents a night for lodging at the Relief Camp," he said, "and fifteen cents a day for food. I've done that for a week."

"Fifteen cents a day!" Aunt Harriet repeated, innocently. "I should ha' said produce was higher, city prices so."

"Food is higher," Sedgwick was repeating, hotly. "Ask grandfather what his month's bills amount to. Ask him how much he probably paid for the dinner we ate to-night. Oh!" The last seemed the cry, if not of the hungry, at least of their champion.

Littleton frowned. "There, Sedgwick," he entreated, "don't you begin on that." He was conscious of a warm heart and a perpetually depleted pocket, and he wished Sedgwick would let him alone to grow old in a well-earned peace, not poisoning his food and drink with the ill-judged reminder that some folks hadn't any.

Ruth's hands were trembling a little, and the pupils of her eyes dilated. It was not easy to see on what side she ranged herself, but wherever she was, it was in a pulsating excitement of mind.

"I can't saddle the church with him," Bond was asserting. "It has done all it ought to in the way of temporary relief."

"Ain't you got any rich folks in it?" Aunt Harriet inquired, with a genuine simplicity.

"The question is," said Sedgwick, in rapid explanation, then to sweep her aside for the immediate issue, "whether the church would have a right to take him in as a regular pensioner when it has so many already for whom it can't find work."

"Mercy!" said Aunt Harriet. "Seems if there was work enough in the world, only anybody's willin' to do it." Then she began to realize that the coil was getting too complicated for her, and withdrew into silence.

"I suppose you wrote to his old home to find out whether his story is true?" Sedgwick was asking.

"Yes," said Bond. "I got the answer to-day. It's all perfectly straight. He's a man of good character. The factory did shut down. He's honestly out of work."

"Won't they give him relief?"

"He won't take it."

"But he'll take it from you!"

"There's something queer about that. He appears to consider it in the nature of a loan till he gets a job. He seems to feel it's different coming through the church."

"So it is," Ruth put in, quickly, adding then, when Sedgwick looked at her as if to demand her reasons, "so it ought to be."

Bond immediately went back to his old perplexity of visage, the expression he had worn in entering. "That's exactly it," he said. "There's something awfully moving about his drifting down here and mak-

ing no appeal, but just going to the church, to sleep, and freeze if he had to. It's as if he had a right to because it was the church."

"Pooh! pooh!" said Littleton. It would have been a simpler thing to make out a check in the beginning than to see his evening dissipated in the fruitless speculating he had for daily meat when Sedgwick was at home. "He went there because it was a shelter and he wasn't likely to be disturbed. He'd have gone just the same if it had been a stock exchange."

"No," said Bond, "I don't agree with you. He went because it was the church.

"Yes," said Ruth, softly, "I think it was because it was the church."

"Oh, unquestionably," said Sedgwick, "it was the church."

"Yes, dear," echoed Mrs. Littleton, in a gentle reproof of her husband's cruder solution. "I guess it seemed different to him because 'twas a church."

"Well," said Littleton, crisply, "what you going to do with him?"

"I don't know," Bond offered, droopingly.

"Pay his fare back to the country?"

"He won't go."

"What does he propose doing?"

"Says he shall find work."

"Have you told him how the unemployed are marching up and down these streets?" Sedgwick inquired, "and if he joins them he'll only be one more?"

"Yes."

"What does he say then?"

"Says he never heard of such a thing."

"Well, I never did either," Aunt Harriet ventured. "That's the sensiblest word I've heard this night."

"Well," said Littleton, conclusively. He dived into his pocket and brought out a five-dollar bill. "Anyway, Bond, you better use that for him till you can ship him. He's got to live."

Bond took it, as it seemed, reluctantly. "Nevertheless," he demurred, "we can't have other towns pouring their unemployed in on us."

"Of course we can't," said Sedgwick. "The problem's got to be met and faced on the spot."

"Seems terrible queer to me," Aunt Harriet murmured, as she went back to her knitting, "it should be so hard to come by work. Most of us see more ahead of us than we can stagger under. If anybody ain't got anything to do, they might be gettin' the bugs off'n the trees."

But this brought on the question of meagre appropriations, and that led to the destruction of the forests, and in the whiff and wind of it all Aunt Harriet felt with bewilderment that she lived in a world "not realized". When Bond took his leave the question went temporarily back to the man in the cloister.

"When shall you see him again?" Sedgwick asked, with no particular purpose.

Bond looked shamefaced. "Why, I might see him any minute," he owned. "He's taken to following me round—when he isn't looking for work. He seems to think because I found him there that I've got some power of life and death—he seems to feel easy with me."

"That's the church again," Ruth declared, and Bond saw assent in all the other faces.

When he had gone, Littleton returned to his book, feeling that immunity was cheaply bought for a five-dollar note, and Sedgwick followed Ruth into the recess of the window, where she had gone to put away her work in the little carved chest under the sill. Aunt Harriet glanced at them contentedly. Now, she thought, they were to have some of the golden confidences suited to their time. But Sedgwick was saying, with a passion in no way less forceful than the passion of love:

"Think of it! While we've been at the theatre, or sitting here by an open fire and then going to bed in luxury, that man has been lying there—or tramping up and down, more likely—in the cold cloister."

"Yes," said she, "it's dreadful. But, Sedgwick—"

"Well?" asked he. Then when she seemed timid about continuing, he recalled himself from somewhere and interrogated her again.

"You know," she said, "when you were at the theatre, maybe you were learning how to write your play. When you sat there by the fire, you were reading a book to teach you how to write other books."

"That's another of my luxuries," he fulminated. "That's what I call the intellectual life. And I can pursue it, and another man has to sleep in the cloister."

"But it's your work," she reminded him. "We both know it's your work."

He was caught up in a cloud of rapt imaginings, and she knew her recall, no matter how clear she made it, would be inaudible to him. Thus it was, day after day. The spirit, she thought, said unto him, Write, but he was too deafened by the clangor of the world

to listen or obey. The spirit might, she knew, have also said unto him, Love, but the homespun way of youth and ardor seemed to him too complex, perhaps also too flowery while others walked on thorns, and he turned from it.

By and by the older people went up to bed and left them still talking in their corner. Then Ruth rose and yet lingered a minute, casting wistful glances about the room, its dying fire, the fitful light on books and ceiling transforming it all, at each leap, into one or another shape of domestic peace. She was seeing its beauty as a refuge and an abiding-place, and with an intensity that gave her an ache in the throat and a constriction of tears. But he was thinking of the man in the cloister.

While he was getting his hat in the hall she was halfway up the stairs. She turned to look at him. "Good night," she said; and then, irrepressibly, seeing that his hand was on the door, "Why, you haven't your overcoat."

"No," said Sedgwick. "Good night."

"Then you're coming back?"

"No, not to-night."

He went out into the cold and left her wondering. She even went down and sought out his coat in the closet under the stairs. There it was, opulent in fur, and her hand curled endearingly over it. When she went up-stairs again, rather slowly and pondering, Mrs. Littleton opened a door above and put out her pink face, funny and dear in its border of blue-ribboned curl papers.

"Isn't he going to stay to-night?" she asked.

"No," Ruth told her, waking to accord a smile out of the desire not to pass on her own perplexity.

"Gone to the Settlement?"

There was nothing to do but to say he was not to be back that night, and then she kissed the pink old face and patted the curl papers and went on. Mrs. Littleton withdrew to her room, sighing a little, to tell her husband she did wish Sedgwick could see how much like a daughter Ruth was, and how perfectly ridiculous it was to pay her wages when she might be— But she paused because, when she got as far as that, her husband always told her Ruth was a dear good girl, but match-makers were meddlers and she'd better shut up.

The next day Sedgwick did not appear, and it was assumed that he was at the Settlement and busy. Once Ruth telephoned him to know whether he knew he had left his coat, but he seemed obtuse to the conventional idea that he might have use for it. But at the end of the message, when she was about to hang up the receiver, wishing he would add a word to prove he was in a sane mind, he called her back.

"Oh," said he, "the coat! If Bond comes in, give it to him. Tell him to hand it over to the man."

"What man?" she asked.

"Have you forgotten him? The man in the cloister."

"Oh, but he isn't sleeping in the cloister now," she reminded him.

"No, I know he isn't. Good-by."

Then there were other days, and at the end of them Bond came in, looking uncontrolledly aghast, as if he had more to communicate than he could possibly prepare suitably for normal ears. It was about the time

of night that he had appeared before, and the scene was the same. Littleton was reading Dickens, twenty pages farther on—he always owned to being a slow reader—Aunt Harriet was knitting, and Mrs. Littleton wound yarn. Only Ruth sat by in an unwonted idleness, inwardly chiding herself for finding the moment dull and wishing it could be shivered into sparkling atoms by an entering presence. Bond looked at them as if he really did not know how to prepare them for what was coming.

"It's the man in the cloister over again," he blurted out.

"Has that fool gone back there?" Littleton inquired, slipping his book-mark over the edge. He looked his boredom. "Well, I'll pay him to get out and go to Palm Beach. Why can't he take himself home and hibernate like the woodchucks? That's all the sense he's got."

Ruth had risen, as if something dragged her to her feet: she stood holding her breath down, and her hands tight.

"It's another man," said Bond, also breathless.

"Then you've allowed it to get into the papers. If there's one suicide, there's always a half-dozen."

"Where is he?" Ruth asked, chokingly.

Bond turned to her who had understood. "I've wrapped him up and telephoned for the ambulance."

"You haven't left him alone?"

"Whittaker's with him."

Aunt Harriet looked up. "Whittaker," she repeated. "That's the name of mother's cousins down through the Gorge. Seems real homey to hear that name."

"Whittaker's the man in the cloister, the first one," Bond explained to Ruth, in a swift aside.

"I'll go and open his room," she said, with the instant air of absorption in an exacting task.

"You'd better."

By the time she was out at the door they were on their feet. Now Mrs. Littleton was trembling. She put a plump ringed hand on the clergyman's arm.

"Mr. Bond," she said, "what's happened? Who is the man? Are they bringing him here?"

He took the hand in his young strong one. "It's your grandson, Mrs. Littleton," he said, in a tone calculated to dominate her. "It's Sedgwick."

"Sedgwick!" fulminated Littleton. "What's he been doing in the cloister?"

"Sleeping there," said Bond, patiently. "He's been doing it for a week."

Littleton gasped at him. "What for?" he entreated. "What, in the name of all created, *for?*"

"To see how it seems," Bond was explaining, from no special wonder of his own, "not to be more fortunate than the other man."

Littleton recovered his breath. "Well, then," he roared, "damn philanthropy! Damn socialism! that's what I say."

"It isn't philanthropy exactly," offered Bond. "It isn't socialism. It's poetry. There he is. I'll open the door."

Sedgwick was not himself, shivering and chattering in the clutches of a chill calculated to teach him what cold could be. Aunt Harriet had sped up to her own room to change her best henrietta and tie on an apron,

judging that she might be needed to nurse. The others got him to bed and the doctor was sent for, and Bond and Whittaker went away, rather hurriedly because Bond judged from the expression of Littleton's face, as he regarded Whittaker, that short shrift would be allowed in that house to a man who had set the fashion of sleeping in cloisters. And yet Whittaker was not a person to be suspected of insurrectionary theory. He was a lean, shrewd-looking New Englander with a long irregular face and sparse locks. An air of extreme mildness enveloped him, and only when one noted the outline and set of his jaw did it seem as if he might unexpectedly show the flag of a wilful obstinacy. His light eyes were rather dull, but they had, it could be seen even in the short interval of his stay, an almost worshipful intensity whenever they encountered Bond, who had become, it was evident, the god of a masterless man. But no one save Littleton, in the extremity of his impatience, had eyes for him that night. Sedgwick, Aunt Harriet said positively, when she appeared, wearing her work-apron, without which she never travelled, was going to be sick.

In the next week he did go through all the hateful stages of it. A nurse came and ruled the household, except Aunt Harriet, who stood by to watch her deft ways with an open-mouthed admiration and won the potentate's regard.

"We'll pull him out," the doctor said, when Mrs. Littleton approached him from the retreat where she hovered at the head of the stairs, and Ruth, lingering in the shadow of the hall, also heard, and ran quickly back into her room. He was pulled out; and Littleton,

when his grandson was convalescent, had to be bound with thongs of remonstrance lest he inquire of Sedgwick why he'd been a blatant fool.

"I can't live unless I know why he's such a fool," he raged, almost weepingly, to Ruth, who was found to be the only one to soothe him. "What does he think he put us through all this for—sleeping in cloisters till he froze himself and living in Settlement houses till he got pneumonia? What's he think it's *for*?"

"He wants to share the common lot," she soothed him.

"The common lot! Why don't he go to work, then, and do something to make the common lot easier, instead of upsetting a whole household and worrying his grandmother to death?"

"Dear Mr. Littleton," said Ruth, mollifying him with her prettiest smile, "the great reformers have always done it—the great, great ones."

"Done what?"

"Shared the common lot."

"Well," said Littleton. He drew his volume of Dickens toward him and grudgingly noted how few pages he had read throughout that anxious interval. "Sedgwick ain't a reformer. He's just a boy that writes poetry for the magazines. And it's good poetry, too. But he can take it from me that he's got to stop sleeping round in cloisters or I shall be disgusted with him—disgusted! I'm pretty near that now."

Another night Sedgwick was downstairs after dinner. He was very pale and handsome, and insisted that he was in no danger of feeling a draught. It was Ruth who showed the strain of the last weeks. Yet she

looked her lightheartedness. While they all sat there in their recovered quiet, Bond came in, and Aunt Harriet innocently tossed the apple of discord again among them.

"Whatever become o' that man?" she asked, guilelessly, "the one that slep' in the cloister?"

Littleton groaned ostentatiously. Bond looked guilty. "Well," said he, "nothing has become of him really. He's living on tuppence a day and going downhill on it. He won't take any money from me, because he says he's able to earn it. He gets a job now and then, a little shovelling or something of that sort, a few cents for carrying bags at the station. He's immovably obstinate."

"You say his name's Whittaker?" Aunt Harriet inquired. "They're all set. Why, I had a kind of a third cousin named Whittaker that gran'ther left my little place to. One day gran'ther got mad with me because I'd bored my ears an' threaded in green silk, an' I wouldn't take it out to please him, an' he made his will all complete, an' this far-away kind of a cousin he said 'twa'n't fair, I was a girl so, an' he up an' refused the whole of it. That's what the Whittakers be."

"There's a lot he might do if he were stronger," said Bond, reflectively, "but he isn't altogether fit. He had a broken arm years ago and it was badly set—"

Aunt Harriet was on her feet. She spoke loudly, and they all looked amazement at her excited face. "Why didn't you tell me that before?" she inquired. "What's his given name?"

"Silas. His name is Silas."

"Why, that's my own third cousin as ever was. I should think you'd ha' had sense enough to told me. Where am I goin' to find him straight off before I take the train to-morrer mornin'?"

Bond took on his look of shamefaced impatience at having to confess himself the victim of an attachment.

"You might find him outside there at this present minute," he owned. "He walked here with me. It really isn't so bad as it seems," he explained to Littleton. "He's always asking me questions about the Second Advent. He has an idea the world is coming to an end presently."

"The fool! course he has!" Aunt Harriet cried. She was at the window and now she threw it wide. "You stan' one side, out o' the draught," she bade Sedgwick over her shoulder. "I won't keep it up but a second. Silas! Silas Whittaker, you step yourself in here." The window came down again with a run, and Aunt Harriet took her resolute way to the front door. "Well, here you be," they heard her saying. "Now ain't you ashamed o' yourself makin' all this to-do when you might ha' wrote to me an' there'd been the end on't?"

Upon that Silas Whittaker followed her in. He was neither surprised nor abashed, only most unaffectedly delighted to find one of his own blood. Aunt Harriet had no idea of naming him to them. The man in the cloister had become too familiar a conception for that.

"You stretch out your arms," she bade him, and when he did it, regarded the worn sleeves affectionately. "Yes, you be Si Whittaker an' no mistake. Your arm trouble you now? Well, 'tain't so much shorter 'n

t'other, an' I guess you can do a day's work with the heft of 'em."

"Glad to see ye, Harriet, glad to see ye," he responded, with a shining face. "You down here nursin'?'

"I'm goin' home to-morrer," said Aunt Harriet. "I'm goin' by the nine o'clock. Now you be down there to the station, an' you come right up along with me, an' stay till the chair factory opens."

His eyes narrowed with the immovable look the Reverend Arthur Bond had learned to venerate. "I ain't no hand for visitin', Harriet," he told her. "Much obliged to *you*."

Aunt Harriet also was a Whittaker, and she knew what medicine agreed with them.

"I've got plenty o' jobs for ye," she cunningly entreated. "There's the house to open an' wood to chop an', soon's the snow's off, the fencin' to do. If I can't depend on my own flesh an' blood, I dunno who I can turn to."

"That so?" Silas inquired, in a dash of eagerness. "Well, I'll be there."

She was following him to the door. "Nine o'clock," she reminded him. "Better be ahead o' time. I got the money for the tickets. We'll have a real nice ride."

When she returned, the others were glowing at her in various fashions.

"So that," said the curate, in a moved voice, "that's your solution."

"What?" asked Aunt Harriet, but not as if the answer concerned her vitally. She was moving about the room with an absorbed look, to be sure none of her

little belongings had escaped her in the afternoon's packing.

"That's the direct, simple, human thing," Sedgwick was saying to her, warmly, as if she were to be commended.

"What is?" Aunt Harriet inquired. "There!" she closed in triumph, pouncing on a small article lurking on the table in the shadow of the books. "There's my spe'tacle-case. Seems if 'twould ruther hide away than eat. Well, good night all. I've got to be up early."

At the door Ruth, ardent as the rest of them, detained her. "They think you're splendid, Aunt Harriet," she cried. "Nobody's seen how to help your cousin Silas in the right way," she threw in as a concession to scientific charity. "But you've done it. You've taken him into your own house."

Aunt Harriet stared at her. "Well," she said, "I just happened to have a house, that's all. If you've got a roof, you might's well call folks under it. An' he's my cousin, ain't he?—third cousin, that is. He ain't nobody else's cousin that I know of. Well, good night all."

"Did she mean," Sedgwick began, out of the silence resultant on her going, "that that's what the rest of us ought to do?"

Ruth burst into a lovely laugh. "Why, bless you," she said, "Aunt Harriet doesn't mean a thing. She hasn't a theory to her name. She's got a house and a third cousin, and the third cousin's got a stiff arm, and she's just decent, that's all—and human—and kind. Oh, I'm awfully tired of having things so complicated. I'm glad there are two or three people left that live in the country and carry jelly to the neighbors when

they're sick, and don't have to wonder whether eleemosynary jelly can hurt 'em. Oh, I don't mean you're wrong, Sedgwick," she added, hastily. "I don't mean you're wrong, Mr. Bond. You just have to be intelligent. I know that. If you weren't, some of you, the whole scheme would go to smash. Only I'm glad some folks—Aunt Harriet, you know—I'm glad they don't have to."

Thereupon she retired to the window in confusion and Bond thoughtfully rose to go. "I fancy Whittaker's waiting out there to say good-by," he explained. "Well, I shall miss him—I dare say more than he misses me."

Littleton and his wife followed him into the hall and said good night; then the wife laid a guiding hand on her husband's arm.

"I guess we might's well go up-stairs now," she said, softly. "Ruth feels kind of excited, speaking out so. I guess she'll want to make it up with Sedgwick before she sleeps."

"What?" said Littleton, staring. "Oh!"

Sedgwick had gone to Ruth. He wore an eager look of wishing to be the one to "make it up". "See," he said stepping past her to the window. "Orion!"

She turned with him. "Yes," she said, and then she added irrepressibly, "Sedgwick, before we've finished with him—"

"The man in the cloister?"

"Yes. Tell me what you got out of it."

"Out of sleeping there? Trying to sleep?"

"Yes."

He smiled with a whimsical gravity. She was watching his face, all eagerness herself, and it seemed to her

she had never seen him look so dear, so like an earlier boyish self. "Why," said he, "I went there to share the other fellow's lot. It wasn't a pose. I really wanted to. But I found all I could think of—when I wasn't too cold to think—was the stars. I hadn't seen so much of them since we lived in the country. I planned a poem. I thought so hard about it I couldn't think of the man in the cloister at all. It's to be 'A Drama of Stars'. It's what the morning stars thought, and Adam and Eve come in. And Eve is you."

"I?"

"Yes, every time. Adam was I and Eve was you."

She was trembling, he saw, but she turned away with dignity enough.

"Then to-night," he said, through an awkwardness fitted to his detaining touch upon her arm, "she finished it."

"Aunt Harriet?"

"Yes."

Ruth nodded. She felt that also, though she wondered whether he, any more than she, could chart the course of Aunt Harriet's influence. But he was ready to essay it.

"She's such a brick!" he said, groping. "She's so warm, so quick somehow. She darts through while the rest of us are laying out the road, and you look up and she's there. When she said that about roofs, she seemed to be drawing pictures for us. She made me see little houses in the country, sheltering roofs, doors always open. I wanted one. I wanted just a house, Ruth, where I could see the stars and then go in and write about 'em. I want it now—with you."

MOTHER

"BUT, Lilian," said Mrs. Hall, "stay here and have your tea with me."

They were in the sombrely furnished drawing-room of the city house, a monument to good taste before the sixties—two middle-aged women who had been schoolmates together and who had seen each other at long intervals for forty years. The hostess, Mrs. Hall, had the advantage of a year or two over her friend, but she had so ignored any amenity time might show her, and had walked so steadfastly and patiently toward the acquiescence of age, at the same time adopting, almost lovingly, the insignia, in cut and fabric, once belonging to it, that now she seemed much the elder. This was all in her general effect when one noted her black dress, the soft line of white at neck and wrist, and the little triangle of lace on her frosted waves of hair. She was a beautiful creature given almost indulgently over to Age, as if he could not hurt her and might as well throw his trappings round her if that had been judged to be the custom; her blue eyes were alive with a light which is the love of everything created, the dark brows over them never frowning, but only strengthening a face that promised to be too gentle, and her mouth smiling most sweetly. Artists had loved and painted and praised her, until she privately declared to her son—her one confidant—that she could-

n't see what possessed them. She had been accounted plain in her youth. This must be a form of kindly modern homage to old age.

Mrs. Kimball, her friend, was young with a difference. She had grown portly and fought that infliction by every means known to modern theory, save relinquishing the indulgences of the table. She was so massaged and creamed and powdered, so alight with barbaric chains on a broad lace-bound bosom, and so evidently sworn not to be cajoled out of youth into the next territory, that Mrs. Hall sat looking at her with a kind of pain. She was wondering uneasily whether she herself had changed so visibly as Lilian, and then, with an undercurrent of amusement and a little frown, remembered the artists and their praise, and gave the riddle up.

"I want you to go with me," Mrs. Kimball was insisting. "Just for a cup of tea at Hervier's. You know Hervier's, don't you?"

Mrs. Hall frowned again, in recollecting.

"Why, yes," she said. "It's that very fashionable place, isn't it, where people drop in after the matinées? And there's music, and—oh, I don't know what all!"

"Yes, and you've heard of it and never wanted to go. Isn't that like you, Rebecca?"

"I have my tea at home," said Rebecca, smiling at her, with a recognition of human differences. "You know, really, Lil, I've lived in the country so long I don't care much for afternoon tea. And I turn my dinner into a kind of supper, and have my tea with it. There!"

"What does your son say?"

"Oh, he just laughs and goes on with his dinner. I have some toast, extra, you know, and a little preserve and a mite of cake. I never did care much about eating at night."

"It's a part of your country habits." Mrs. Kimball was twisting her soft wrist with difficulty to consult the watch strapped to it by gilded chains. "Haven't you ever regretted living out of the world so long?"

"Never. I wish I were out of it now."

"Why aren't you?"

"Well, you see I came away when Gil went to college, and now he has his studio here. Oh, no, I couldn't be happy away from him. He wouldn't like it either."

"But you let him go abroad alone."

Mrs. Hall gave way to sudden merriment.

"I made him. I was afraid he'd get to feeling he was mother's pet."

Mrs. Kimball always sat very straight to obviate the effect of her rotundities, but now she lifted herself higher with the access of a difficult resolve.

"Well, you know, Rebecca," she said, "I came home on the steamer with Gilbert."

Mrs. Hall nodded, in approval of so pleasant a conjunction.

"Yes, I know," she said. "He was so glad to find you were sailing."

"Well, he took precious little pains to gladden himself further when we had sailed."

Mrs. Hall flushed and her brows came together in concern.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Lil. He wasn't rude to you?"

"He wasn't rude, but he was cloistered. Nobody

could get near him. Everybody wanted to. He's handsome as a god."

The mother drew a little satisfied breath.

"Isn't he a giant?" she said, though her eyes committed her to more. "Yes, people do notice him, of course. He's so big, for one thing. They can't help seeing him."

"I was sorry he was so much in evidence. He seems to be a curiously unworldly kind of boy. Not self-conscious at all. Not in the least prudent about being looked at. He doesn't know the first principles of caution."

Mrs. Hall drew her brows together again in their look of perplexity. This all sounded like commendation, and yet she was perfectly conscious that it was not: that it was, in some sort, flaunted before her like a danger signal.

"What is it, Lilian?" she asked, with the quietude of one in an assured position toward life and what it can do or threaten. "What do you want to tell me about Gil? You haven't come here to praise him."

Mrs. Kimball laughed with an accented robustness.

"I haven't come to do the other thing," she declared, in a lively tone that sought to carry reassurance with it. "I admired him, I can assure you, quite particularly. But I was hardly ever so surprised in my life that a boy of his look of—well, you know his kind of look. You're perfectly well aware that he looks as if he'd been born to things and had them all his life, as he has. I was surprised, Beck, to find he was so simple."

Rebecca was gazing straight at her out of blue, un-

smiling eyes, yet not sternly, but as if the sincere eyes meant to challenge the same clarity in the glance they met.

"How is he simple, Lilian?" she asked.

"Why, he's so unworldly. He takes such frightful risks."

"I wish," said Mrs. Hall, patiently, "you'd tell me what you mean. You're complaining of Gil. I can see that."

Her friend's high color began to intensify itself unnecessarily. It had exceeded the bounds devoted to good health or beauty, and seemed to be the signal of embarrassment.

"I hope you know how interested I am in everything that concerns you, Rebecca," she began, awkwardly. "I never forget old times."

"No," said Rebecca. She was leaning a little now on her chair back, as if she needed it to support her, and had folded her hands with a gentle grace in her lap. "I'm sure you don't forget old times, Lily. We don't either of us. You've been a faithful friend."

"I mean to be a friend still. That's why I've come. Rebecca, do you happen to know anything about Vivian Bruce?"

Mrs. Hall shook her head. She could not yet see how the inquiry pertained, and yet Lilian's continued fluster made it evident that it did.

"That's just like you, Beck. I'd have been willing to bet you didn't."

Mrs. Hall smiled a little as at something she had heard before.

"Well, you needn't scold me if I don't!" she deprecated, prettily. "I'm willing to know about her now."

"I'm afraid you'll have to. Now think, Rebecca, think back a minute. Haven't you read a word about her? Two divorce suits, one husband that shot himself, one that went to India and got killed, everybody says because he couldn't bear to live and lose her—haven't you read that?"

Mrs. Hall shook her head definitively.

"Well, I've no patience with you."

"I don't read much in the daily papers. Gil keeps me posted about things I ought to know. All this winter I've been reading about the time of Queen Elizabeth."

"Queen Elizabeth! And here's your son—well, all I can say is, Vivian Bruce's life is as absorbing as Queen Elizabeth's and all the rest of them in any novel or any history—why, it *is* history. You'd better leave your Queen Elizabeths and see what's doing in New York under your nose this very day."

"I sha'n't need to, Lil. You'll tell me."

Mrs. Kimball smiled perfunctorily with her friend, and again consulted her watch.

"Well, the long and short of it is," she continued, somewhat in haste, "Vivian is a charmer. She's beautiful and she's got that particular way with her, and she's an adventuress, straight. If you turned her into the Garden of Eden, she wouldn't stay there. She'd get the Serpent to let her out, and he'd do it, and he wouldn't be satisfied with that. He'd go with her. She's a woman that likes the drama, something doing,

and it's always emotional. Don't you see? She sticks at nothing. She's dangerous."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Hall, pleasantly. A light had risen in her eyes. She looked, for the first time, slightly on guard. "She sounds like history herself. Seems to me I've read something like that, 'way back in Egypt, or Troy."

Mrs. Kimball made an impatient movement of her hand in its constricting glove.

"I don't know anything about that. I don't have time to read. But I suppose they've always existed, and we've got to make the best of it. Well, she crossed with us."

"With you?"

"With all of us. Particularly with your Gilbert."

Mrs. Hall did not move by an instant of trembling, and her eyes, with their look of observant interest, remained quietly upon her friend's.

"You mean Gilbert met her?" she asked.

"Yes, for the first time. I fully believe it was the first time. But she selected him—it's her custom to fix upon one man or another—and through the whole voyage he didn't leave her side."

"She must be very attractive," murmured the mother.

"Attractive? Don't I tell you she's a serpent? We don't know anything about such women, you and I. We don't see how they do it. We may wish we did" —she stopped for an instant, dashed by that cool attention in the other face—"well, we don't, that's all. Only it's something they're born with. And when a man finds himself up against it, par-

ticularly a young man, it spells ruin, Beck, just ruin."

"Do you mean," asked her friend evenly, "that Gilbert wishes to marry her?"

Mrs. Kimball gave a little shriek and threw up her hands.

"Marry! Good gracious, child, men don't marry Vivian Bruce!"

"But you tell me she's been married twice already."

"That's precisely why she can't be again, to anybody who doesn't want to damn himself. It isn't marriage I'm afraid of, Beck. It's seeing your boy lying dead with a hole in his forehead, like that young Simpson at Monte Carlo. He got tangled up with precisely that kind of creature—only not so fetching. Heavens, no! But just as unscrupulous."

"Did you see young Simpson?" asked Rebecca, with an amiable interest that might have been exercised to draw the line of thought away from this particular phase. Lilian suspected it at once, and sat looking at her with an arrested wonder, as if she had begun to accuse her friend of more cleverness than had been apparent in forty years.

"Of course I didn't see him," she said, impatiently. "But other people did. It was in the papers. And your Gilbert, if I read him at all, is exactly the same sort of fellow—quick, mettlesome, ready to dare everything he has for a passion. Why, his brazen absorption in her on board ship shows what he'd do. And the boy has a *good* look, Beck. It went to my heart. It wasn't only because he's your boy. I felt he ought to be saved."

Mrs. Hall bent suddenly forward and laid a hand on her friend's knee.

"You're a dear, Lilian," she said, in a voice quite caressing in its affectionate gratitude. "Now I'm really going to give you some tea."

Mrs. Kimball drew a breath, since the worst of the interview was over. Yet she did look worried still, having more to venture and finding she must brace herself to press it.

"No," she said; "you're coming with me to Hervier's."

Mrs. Hall rose with her, and stood for a moment, her delicate hand on the chair back as if she needed it to stay her.

"Very well," she said. "I will." There was a certitude of calm in her voice; she seemed to be accepting a test of her own courage or endurance, and after that moment of halting by the chair as if she might demand continued support, she turned and walked to the door with a dignified precision of step and the grace of her erect slenderness.

"Well," said Mrs. Kimball to herself, with a breath, "that's over;" and then she became aware that in her haste she had said it while her friend could hear.

Mrs. Hall was presently back again, gloved and ready, in her little bonnet and its long veil, and Mrs. Kimball noted that the swift preparation she had made allowed no time for the slightest breakdown. When they went out together she was wondering whether Rebecca had a marvellous endurance or whether she were really ignorant of the color of certain things. Her

own courage was wavering, and they drove away to Hervier's talking of the day with its flavor of later summer, and once, for quite five minutes, of a magical conserve Mrs. Hall had been making of raspberries and ginger and lemon and a set of as unlikely potmates. When it came to the conserve, Mrs. Kimball listened to her with a frank astonishment. She had no time for affairs of the household, and it filled her with unstinted wonder to hear a woman who had been asked to approach a coming blur on her son's fame talking gently of quantities and periods of boiling.

At Hervier's it was the chosen time of day for idleness and fashion. In the long room with its little white tables, shadowed and flickered upon by the green of moving leaves, with the subdued liquid dropping of harp music, there were men and women everywhere, childishly busy in the hunt for pleasure. It seemed to be a show of the elect in costume and the soft sweep of feathers, the waving and glossing of hair. Mrs. Kimball looked about her in an anxiously scrutinizing way, and after rejecting the offer of two or three tables, finally selected one overlooking the entire room. There she placed her friend, and instead of taking the opposite seat, had her own chair moved to the end of the table so that she also could approximately command the scene. Then, her order given, she leaned back and looked. Mrs. Hall gazed also, with a child-like curiosity. She could only compare it, drawing upon the simple images of a sober life like hers, to the opera, where she was accustomed to see raiment of incredible splendor. The comparison was not inapt, for this was the overflow from a brilliant matinée.

"This is very pretty," she kept saying—"very pretty. I'm so indebted to you."

Mrs. Kimball watched and did not answer; but presently her pose relaxed and she gave a little exclamation and laid her hand on her friend's wrist. Mrs. Hall glanced at her, followed her look, and started slightly. Two persons were walking down the room, a man and woman, he equipped with a comely strength, the innocent bravery of youth and she in the studied insolence which meets the world's contumely with a hard consciousness of its own endowment, the army of charms it has to fight with, and the certainty that in all time that soldiery will never be without power in the field.

"There!" breathed Mrs. Kimball.

"Oh," said her friend, with a cool and pretty interest, "there's Gilbert. Is that his friend?"

"Yes. It's Vivian Bruce."

Mrs. Hall lifted her eye-glasses hanging by their thread of a chain and set them on her nose. She followed the two superb figures down the room to their conspicuous seat by a fountain at the end. "What lovely hair!" she said, in quite an unaffected interest. "And what a gorgeous dress!"

Lilian Kimball looked at her now in a puzzled questioning. She had dismissed Gilbert and his drama to wonder again whether Rebecca was not more of a woman of the world than she had thought. Or was she too simple to read the import of these things? Or was she, under her saint's guise, too worldly to balk at them? That, though it might prove venial in some women, would be monstrous in her. But Rebecca was speaking, with a pretty, gracious uplift of the voice.

"Lilian, it's very rude—I wouldn't do it if the circumstances weren't exactly as they are—but I'm going to ask you to drink your tea alone and let me go to them."

"Go to them! Have tea with them?"

Mrs. Hall nodded, smilingly shutting up her eyeglass as she spoke and tucking it into its accustomed nest of folds.

"Rebecca, you can't have tea with her. She's notorious."

Mrs. Hall laughed a little in an amused, sweet way. "Well, I'm not notorious. Gil isn't either."

Her friend laid an anxious hand on her arm.

"Rebecca," she breathed, "you won't make a scene?"

Rebecca laughed outright.

"You're a goose, Lil," she said.

"You see," Mrs. Kimball went on, in a distracted whisper, "they're the most conspicuous people in the room. She is always, everywhere she goes, and she's been here with him two days running, to my knowledge. They were here yesterday and here the day before. She likes to bring him, to display him. I made up my mind to get you here. I knew they'd be here after *Tristan*."

"There, you see! you've brought me, and I've spied the lady and I want to know her."

"Don't you see people looking at them?"

"Yes. No wonder. They're very handsome."

"Well, they'll look at you, too, if you go down there."

"I've got on my best bonnet and good gloves. Don't I look nice enough?" There was a pretty moment of intent query in her look, and then she went sailing

away with her indeterminate grace, which was a girl's endowment, after all, down the long room with couples and athwart them, and made her way directly to the table.

Gil was talking when she got there. He had a flushed face and ardent eyes, and her heart leaped at the sight of him, his beauty and the strange look he always wore, in a sophisticated crowd, of being one set apart by healthier living, or, in some form, a more sound inheritance. He glanced up at her as she halted, black-robed, beside him, and his lips stayed parted with the words they meant to utter. The woman, too, looked up at her, and Rebecca Hall felt another pang, an especial and choking one, over her, her airy supple grace, the distinction of her bright hair and beautiful hands, and the challenge in the great gray eyes and the mobile lips, not full, but curved until the heart might faint in following them. Then Gilbert was on his feet, and his mother had said with her unabashed simplicity:

"I'm going to have my tea with you. Introduce us, won't you?"

He did it, blunderingly, out of a rash certainty that in some way he should have, as well, to terminate the combination; but his mother had waived all possibilities but that of her coming tea, and was seated between him and Vivian Bruce, telling how she had seen them by chance and left her own table because theirs seemed cozier. Vivian Bruce was looking at her with distended eyes. At first she was slightly on her guard, a little sharp from furtive seeking for motives behind the apparent one; but as the older woman went on with her harmless flow of commonplace she broke in and joined

them. She was the first to gather up her gloves and make a move to go.

"I shall have to leave you," she said, sweetly. "My car is at the door. I'm going to drive myself. No," she added, definitively, as Gilbert rose with her, "I don't want you, please."

His mother, too, had risen.

"I wish you wanted me," she said to Vivian. "I wish you'd take me home."

"Mother!" Gilbert was evidently warning her, but she did not look at him. Her eyes were on the other face, suddenly alive with pleasure.

"Would you really let me?" said Vivian Bruce. "I'd be so glad."

So they went up the room together past Lilian Kimball, whom Mrs. Hall somehow failed to see until the last instant for squeezing in a bow, and Gilbert had put them into the car, and stood bareheaded on the sidewalk looking at them. His mother knew that look. It was his beseeching yet confident gaze, as of a dog who hardly likes to bark for what he wants, yet knows he is too popular to run much risk of losing it. But that one time he was going to lose it.

"Run along, Gil," said his mother. "Call at Aunt Josephine's on the way, will you, and tell her I want to know about her cold?" Then the two women were driving off together between the lights coming out to meet the western flare, and she went on, still cozily: "I made up that errand. Really, I didn't want him. Three can't get acquainted. Two can, I think; don't you?"

Vivian Bruce stiffened a little under her furs.

"It isn't accident, then?" she said. "You came to Hervier's to see me?"

"No," said Mrs. Hall. "But when I saw you I knew I'd got to know you. Somebody told me my boy was getting acquainted with you."

Vivian sat looking straight ahead, watching absorbedly and driving fast. She smiled a little.

"They are very precious, aren't they," she said, "these boys? Your boys, all boys?"

"Oh yes," said the mother, simply. "It isn't only because they're ours; but they're men, you see. They belong to us a little, but they belong to other things a hundred times more—their country, the wives they're going to marry."

They did not speak again until the car drew up at Mrs. Hall's door, and then Vivian sprang gallantly out, and gave her charge a sustaining hand.

"Come in," said Mrs. Hall, impulsively. "I don't know you any better than I did at the tea table. I never shall, if we go motoring together. I've got to see you by my own fire. Please."

Vivian, who was the taller, looked down at her a moment, and then acquiesced bluffly like a charming boy.

"Well," said she, "I will."

So they went up the steps, and Mrs. Hall, without ringing for service, made her put off her fur coat and sit down at the hearth. Then she mended the fire with her own hands and much skill, and suddenly from her own chair looked across at her visitor.

"Well," she said, "isn't this funny?"

Vivian Bruce, too, laughed. Then she sobered.

"Mrs. Hall," she said, "you'd heard of me. You've brought me here to talk to me. Now haven't you?"

"I've brought you because I'm simply so curious about you I couldn't let you go. That's the truth. Believe me."

"Why were you curious?"

"Because you were with Gil. And because he hadn't spoken about you."

Vivian laughed a little, in a hard way.

"Does he always speak about people?" she inquired.

"'Most always," said his mother. "When he thinks of it, I'm sure."

"Then maybe he hasn't thought of it?"

Vivian was questioning her now with the full power of the gray eyes intensified by a light in them.

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Hall, still quietly. "He's thought of you. Anybody would, that saw you once."

A flush crept into the woman's face and awakened it to a wistful life. She gave the interview an unexpected turn.

"Do you think I'm so horrid?" she inquired.

"Horrid? My child!"

"You think I'm conspicuous."

Mrs. Hall looked at her with a frank and challenging scrutiny. It was not sharp. It was at once direct and firm.

"I think you're very handsome," she said. "You're the handsomest woman I ever saw."

"But you find a lot of fault with me. I'm not even handsome your way."

The humble voice was not, her listener felt sure, assumed to meet the peculiarities of the situation, or

to reconcile in any manner their standards of the beautiful. It came from something alive and glowing under all this bravery and glitter.

"No," she said, steadily, "I don't find any fault with you. But I want to know you."

"So you can find fault if you have to?"

"Yes. Or"—the kindly voice warmed into a thrill of whimsical protest against wholesale relegation to a world of feminine prejudice—"so I can admire you all I want to."

The other woman frankly stared at her. Then she put out one small, exquisite foot to the blaze, drawing her skirt away from it and regarding it impersonally.

"No," she said, gloomily, after a pause, "you won't admire me. You can't."

"Oh," cried the mother, quite unaffectedly, "I'm sorry. For I'm pretty exacting, after all. If I can't, I don't want Gil to."

Then they were both silent, and presently Vivian looked up. She gave a little sigh.

"He doesn't—yet. Not as you're afraid. He truly hasn't begun to."

"Were you—" the mother began, gently, and stopped.

"Was I going to make him? Yes, I was."

"Are you going to now?"

"I don't know. Yes, if I want to."

Again they sat with their own separate musings, the younger running bitterly back over the unfriendliness of woman warring against woman for the possession of the other element that did not seem to her so valu-

able, after all. Sometimes she wished she could live with women alone, breathing their affectionate, cool companionship. Yet she knew it was not possible. They wouldn't have her with a perfect trust, and even if they would, the old call must come sounding to her out of the necessities of things, and she would go forth from any haven to find her mate that was also, each time, her prey, as she was his.

"No," she said, heavily, as if she sulked under discipline, "I suppose I sha'n't. I suppose you think you've earned him by being faithful and self-sacrificing —and wearing little black bonnets—" Her voice broke, and she added, out of an impatience savage in its suddenness and her own inability to master it: "Oh, you're a darling thing. Take your boy. Take him and be done with it."

It was like an assault on the decorous shyness which had wrapped the other woman all her life, to find her son, whom she could not help wanting to encase in a privacy like her own, tossed back to her, a chattel another woman did not keep. But it was only a little hurt on the outer skin of her pride. She had long ago learned that life is a process of bruises on vulnerable organs, and that she had been tremendously fortunate in her seclusion and her protected state. She had been schooling herself all these years to remember that Gilbert was in the stress of things, and that, if she meant to share his life at all, she must meet crude miseries without wincing. So it was out of these old resolves that she spoke, with a gentle brevity.

"You're not to give up anything that's right for you both to have. If he likes you—specially—" Her voice

failed her, and Vivian could see that at last one delicate hand was trembling.

"I've told you he doesn't care for me—'specially'," she said, with a bluff kindliness. "And I don't care for him. But—suppose I did—suppose we did—what would you have done then?"

The mother's face looked wan in sudden pallor. Her certainties, her quietness, seemed suddenly washed away from it. One could see it in the utmost pathos of an undefended age.

"Why," she said, "I should want you to let me be in it with you."

"In it? He couldn't marry me. I'm not free to marry."

Mrs. Hall was looking at her with eyes that implored her to spare them both the cruder tests.

"I haven't thought any farther," she said. "Only I have always wanted—I always meant—if my son had attachments, to be as friendly—as understanding—" Her voice failed her. She really had no idea how to put her pure purpose into words.

"You mean, whatever woman he got attached to, you intended to know her—to like her if you could?"

"Yes." The mother spoke with relief now that her intent was being elaborated for her.

"You'd know her socially. You'd have her here in your house."

"I should want to."

"Any woman, you mean, any kind of woman?"

"Yes."

"Good God!" This was under her breath, an exclamation not of blasphemy, but of wonder. She was looking

at the pale face now, still under its veil of prophetic age, with a frank incredulity. Suddenly, while her eyes met that other wistful gaze which seemed to implore her out of her worldly cunning to tell another woman how to be as wise, tears came blindingly. They hurt her, and she pressed them back again with closed lids and an impatient hand. "Well," she said, "I hope you won't come to grief, that's all. If you do, I hope I sha'n't know it. But you won't. Your boy's a good boy. He's got an iron kind of a will in him too. See here." She laughed a little in that mocking self-communion of hers. "I can drop him; but do you want him to drop me? Would that save your pride?"

The other shook her head. Bigger things than pride were involved, and she did not quite know the phrases for explaining how poor a trapping she considered pride to be.

"I can tell him," Vivian went on—"I can tell him I couldn't stand his mother. I can jeer at you, a little, only a little. He'd take off his hat and leave me."

"Oh no," she breathed, "you mustn't do that."

"Why mustn't I?"

"He wouldn't like it. He wouldn't like you."

"Don't I tell you he wouldn't like it? Don't we both want him not to like me?"

"Oh, I do want him to like you," said the other woman, impetuously. "I want him to respect you."

Vivian seemed for an instant to be staring her down; but her own lids fell first, and again she pressed them with angry fingers.

"That's a hard saying," she returned. "There's something about a camel and the eye of a needle." She

had risen now and stood with one foot on the head of the fire-dog. "Well," she said, gravely, "perhaps he can. He's as queer as you in some ways. Perhaps he can."

"Oh, he does!" the mother declared, tumultuously. "Does respect me? How do you know?"

"Oh, I know Gil. He wouldn't like you if he didn't."

There they stood staring at each other, the mother with such boundless belief in all possibilities openly written in her face that Vivian for one bewildering moment felt as she sometimes did on a spring morning, at her first waking, as if the world were new and she with it.

"I'm going abroad," she said, abruptly, when the dream snapped. "He sha'n't mope about me. I'll leave him free as—free as you want me to. He sha'n't sulk. He'll be a little cockier, that's all. He'll think he's proved a model of chivalry and found I was a good fellow."

She was on her way to the door, without an offered hand-shake, and Mrs. Hall hastened after her.

"Oh," she said, "that's good—that's wonderful—but I want you to be free too. You're not—you could tell me, you know—you won't miss him—"

A child's mirth had run over the woman's face and chased away certain lines that aged and hardened it. She laid her hands on her friend's shoulders, held them there a moment, and then, stooping, kissed both the soft pale cheeks.

"Am I in love with him, you mean? No. I'd got done being what you call in love when he was fifteen. I sha'n't ever see you again, madonna. Give me one more kiss. In love? You needn't worry. Why, bless you! I'm in love with *you!*"

THE STORY OF ABE

THERE is something that all dogs know and a few men. It is what gives the dog that look in the eyes, of unconquerable love, of hope even against the fact of abuse."

This was what the lean gray-headed man with the army button said to the rest of us smoking with him on the hotel veranda. Then he took out his big worn wallet and selected from it a yellowed paper, put on his eye-glasses, and scanned it frowningly. "Yes," said he, "I've got that right. I wrote it down some years ago. I've tried to get a little further with it, but I never did."

One of the men had just given a dog—his own dog—a cuff, as he thought righteously. Mac was a sober collie, a one-man dog, with no eye for any but his master, and he had, apparently without provocation, assaulted a nervous fox-terrier and sent him away yapping, with a salutary memory of rough-shod teeth. And then his master had roared out and cuffed him, and he had taken his dose with a faultless bearing and lain down in a pretence at the *dégagé* "flump" of a dog with nothing to do of a shiny afternoon but snap at flies and dream of battles won. He seemed not to recognize in the least that his dignity had been assailed; but he did give his master, in the one moment of accepting the cuff, a look, half remonstrance and half a divine

reproach. Even then there was no resentment in it. We who had seen the foregoing provocation—his master had been back to it—rushed in to say that Mac hadn't been the offender. Foxy had nagged him and taken unwarrantable liberties such as no high-bred person could suffer. Therefore Mac had done justly in his brief reproof. The master upon that bent down and gave MacGregor's forehead an apologetic smooth, and Mac looked up with that same clear faith in the mirror of his eyes—forgetfulness, too: yet he had more brain, we knew, than half of us, with cells in it for memory. Then it was that the lean old man who always looked an-hungered and not able to tell of it, as if all his heart's dearest had gone to Kingdom Come and he was too busy deferring the desire of them to have any present wants, made that remark I have remembered.

"What is it?" asked Mac's master, quickly. "What is it dogs know and we don't?"

He was an artist with slim brown hands and a sensitive face. I think he was nettled at having shown himself impulsive and not having kept the code with Mac, and he wanted to find out as much as possible about dogs, as soon as possible.

"Did I ever tell you," said the old gentleman, "about Colonel Annerly's dog?"

He never had. We lit up again, those of us who had let our pipes cool, and thought commiseratingly of the expectation the ladies cherished, flitting white-skirted down to the summer-house, of seeing us presently at afternoon tea. There was a decided anticipation of something to come: for the nice old gentleman

with the patient face hadn't talked much up to now, and we shared the feeling that he wouldn't take the trouble to embark if it wasn't worth while. He looked like the sort of person who would ticket his recollections and keep only the ones that had some assured value. His mind was, I am convinced, so constantly on the certainty of active life's being over that he wouldn't be apt to clutter up his pigeonholes with extraneous truck. His will, perhaps, and a few, a very few, inevitable and sacred memories, were all he would be likely to concern himself with now.

"Colonel Annerly," said he, in the grave manner of one bringing out something exceedingly precious, and letting us note that it would have to be seriously regarded, "went all through the war."

He said it as they do who made a part of the Rebellion, as if there were but one war known to history.

"We saw a good deal of each other. I was a private when he was a lieutenant. But we had friends in common. He was a Virginian: good blood, very good blood. By the way, Annerly wasn't his name. I shouldn't take the liberty—Annerly's my name."

"After the war was over," he went on, "I didn't see him again for maybe twenty years; and then one summer I went up with my—people"—he made a little pause here, a reverent pause, and it was evident that his people were dead—"to a little town in Vermont—near Mansfield. Nice little town it was, a good hotel. Burned since. And Mansfield is a very beautiful mountain. The sunrises there—ah, well!"

He lost himself a moment, patently in memory, and

then Mac got up, snapped at a fly, and threw himself down again. That recalled him.

"Ah!" he brightened. "What was I saying? That summer in Vermont. Well, Colonel Annerly was there. The first sight I had of him was one morning when I was setting out for a little walk. It was market day; country folks brought in calves and pigs, and there was a prodigious roaring and squalling and cackling all the forenoon long, and about three they set off home again without the calves and pigs, with plugs of tobacco, and tea and sugar, and flat bottles, and the misses had their ribbons, I suppose. Well, this day nobody seemed to be buying anything for a minute, but they all stood knotted in a crowd and everybody was laughing. And I looked up where they were looking, up in a balcony of a little tavern there—not my hotel; that was bigger—but a very little tavern indeed—and there was Colonel Annerly making a speech, and he was drunk, gentleman, drunk as a lord. I stopped. I couldn't believe my eyes. 'Who's that?' I says to a man—he looked like an ostler—with a rope in his hand. He was going from stable to pump, and stopped to listen and grin. 'That's Colonel Annerly,' says he. 'What's he doing here?' says I. 'He lives here,' says he. 'No, he doesn't,' says I. I was pretty stupid over it all, but I never imagined the Colonel outside his State. 'He's a Virginian.' I guess I'd thought of him in 'marble halls' and all that sort of thing. I'm only a plain New-Englander myself. 'Oh,' says the man, 'his mother was a Vermont girl, and after the war the Colonel and Miss Sally—that's his sister—they come up here. I guess they were burnt out o' house and

home, and 'twas all they *could* do.' He went along to the pump, and I stared at the Colonel and listened to him, and while I listened I got pretty hot."

He looked it then. His blue eyes were sharp as the flash on steel. His nervous hand, with the little gnarls at the joints, began beating on the veranda rail.

"He was making a speech about the war. It was a good speech. It would have been if he'd been sober; but he was drunk, and every tomfool among 'em laughed: not because he said anything to laugh at, but because he was drunk. And while I looked at him I realized he'd changed, the Colonel had. 'Twas more than middle age. He was a handsome man, a very personable man. But his face had got a little bloated, and his hair had whitened and he'd let it grow—well, it made me sick. You see, I'd seen him on a horse."

His mouth flickered into a spasm of the pain it had all given him, but he went quickly on like a man who has undertaken a dolorous task that must, he being methodical and stout-willed, be finished.

"Then he stopped. The Colonel stopped. He'd looked up the street, and there walking along, from the post-office, I knew—I went there myself every day—was an old lady, about as old as he was, and thin and white-haired and dressed in black silk, and I guessed who it was—Miss Sally. The Colonel took off his hat—he wore a big gray felt—and just at that minute out tumbles a dog, a kind of a nice, good-sized yellowish mongrel, part collie, too—the kind you respect—from the window behind him and began to bark like all possessed. The Colonel yelled at him and the tomfools began to clap—it seemed to be a terrible

funny joke that the dog was making a speech, too—and when the Colonel couldn't stop the creature by yelling, he struck at him with his hat, and then, I believe, he kicked him"—this he offered delicately, as if it were ticklish business to remember with an unjustly disgraced person like Mac at hand—"and finally the Colonel sat down in a chair on the balcony and fanned himself with his hat, and the dog lay down beside him at once, gentlemen, and dropped his head for a snooze, as if there hadn't the least thing in the world happened. And the old lady kept her head up in the air and walked by as if it was nothing in the world to her. But I knew it was Miss Sally. Well, I didn't let many hours slip before I went round to see the Colonel. Not that day. I gave him time—" Here he paused, rather at a loss, and a younger man of the company, too young to remember other years and manners when there were simpler if cruder names for things, supplied a flippant modernism for getting over a jag—and the old gentleman instantly frowned at him. We frowned too, all of us, partly in sympathy and partly because we were afraid, if the serene current of his intent were broken, he might not go on with the story at all. But it was still a task undertaken and, like everything in his dutiful life, to be completed.

"He was glad to see me. We had a good deal to talk about. All through that call we lived over old times. It wasn't for several other visits that we got round to the present and the tavern and the dog. For my story's about the dog, gentlemen, really about the dog."

"What was his name?" the young man pelted in.

Annerly answered him with perhaps a wilfully contrasting dignity.

"Abe. He'd named him for the President. It may have been disrespectful; if he'd done it in his sober minutes maybe he'd have felt it so, but the Colonel wasn't very often sober, and he called the dog by that name. You know, gentlemen, as soon as you begin to think about a person or a particular thing, everything else seems to bring you news of 'em. It's just as if your mind was out inquiring about 'em all day long. Well, I didn't ask any questions about the Colonel—of course I didn't—but it wasn't a week before I had a lot of data about him. He was an interesting figure, and folks talked. It seemed, though he'd fought for our side, Miss Sally was red-hot Secesh. But that hadn't made any material difference between 'em. They'd put their little money together—and they had little less than nothing when all's said and done—and come up North, as the ostler had told me, to live in the old house. But I suppose they lived pretty nigh the wind—I'm country-bred, gentlemen; the old sayings cling to me—and the Colonel felt he had to take a little nip now and then—I told you he'd been pretty seriously wounded, didn't I? Well, besides that he had a troublesome heart; and there was no proper society in the place for a man of his calibre. So you see he took to drinking very naturally, very naturally indeed, and that just about broke Miss Sally's heart and her pride. Nobody ever told me these reasons for their tiff. They just told me the Colonel went to the tavern and got noisy drunk and then blind drunk. But I was very much attached to him, very

much indeed, and I gave a good deal of time to thinking about it. And it didn't take me long to see it was very natural, could hardly have been helped, you might say, with things as they were. Miss Sally wasn't a gentle person, as some women are. She didn't suffer and say nothing. She was high as ninety, I've understood; and one day the Colonel just packed up his trunk and came over to the tavern and took a room, and they hadn't spoken since. He brought the dog with him. The dog had come to them. He'd walked into town one day with a drunken tramp, and the tramp had got full, if he wasn't before, and that night broke through the railing down at the horse-pond, and the dog had run back to town for help as rationally as a man would have done, and when the tramp was fished out dead the dog sat down on his haunches and looked round, they said—the Colonel said; he was there—as if he was asking: 'Well, what next? What's my next incarnation going to be?' the Colonel said he seemed to be asking—the Colonel had quite a clever habit of words—and when the crowd dispersed and the body was carried off, the dog just got up and trotted after the Colonel. He'd picked him out, and he trotted home with him. That tickled the Colonel, flattered him maybe. It would flatter any of us—but it seemed to him a kind of human thing to do. So he told Miss Sally that the dog was going to live with them and he wouldn't take a hundred dollars for him. And when he and Miss Sally had their flare-up and he left, there was no question but the dog must go with him. Well, sirs, that dog was a queer dog. Everybody saw it. I believe the other dogs saw it, too, for they never

seemed to cock an ear at him even, when he went by. I don't believe they were afraid of him. He was as goodnatured a creature as ever lived; but he always seemed to be on business of his own—trot, trot, head up, nose alive, eyes bright and a little anxious. Yes, he had business, and it wasn't long before I found out what it was. I'm particularly fond of dogs, but I never've had one of late years, never been stationary enough, and I should be sorry to leave a dog—" the other look came into his eyes, the one that must have meant long journeyings to those he called his folks, at the end. He recalled himself, but not until he had bent and given Mac a little touch on the ear. The dog knew what it was—not a fly, but a friend, though it was so soft, and he lifted his head a moment to see who knew him so well, and then dropped it with a bump.

"Yes," said Annerly, "he'd built up a business, and he had to give his whole time to it and his whole mind. It was taking care of the Colonel."

"When he was slewed?" the young man of no diffidences inquired.

Annerly did not hear him. He had sent his mind back to scrutinize that map of the long past, perhaps not altogether refreshing his memory, but because he himself may not have understood it as well as he could wish.

"The amount of it was," said he, "the dog was on the watch. When the Colonel was himself, the dog took his naps, kept himself to himself, and actually seemed to be saving up for the next bout. And the Colonel wasn't a finger-deep in whiskey before the dog was on to it, ears up, nose quivering, tail going whenever the

Colonel looked at him, as if he was beseeching him to remember they were up against it again, and for the Lord's sake to see if they couldn't look sharp and come out of it this time with a whole skin."

He was talking more easily as he got warmed up to it. Evidently the matter meant a good deal to him, the more, perhaps, as time gave him perspective.

"You see," he continued, rather feeling his way now, as if this chapter of it hardly concerned us, and could only be opened with the utmost delicacy of manipulation, "when the Colonel had had a drop too much, he was possessed to talk. And there's no doubt talking to the kind of people he did—ready to laugh and slap their legs—he made himself ridiculous. That was the thing that had been wormwood to Miss Sally—stump oratory, you know, kind of old-fashioned American-eagle business. I'm told there's something of the sort in Biglow Papers. I never read them myself. I like my English spelled right, and pronounced right, when it comes to that. Well, the dog seemed to hate it as much as Miss Sally did, and the queer part of it was, he knew what was coming. The Colonel would get up, sometimes in the balcony off his room, and sometimes on the old tree stump in the square, sometimes on the band stand—anywhere he happened to be—and strike out and rain down the long words and saw the air, and the dog wouldn't let him get in more than two sentences deep before he'd break up the meeting. It's curious to me now to remember the ways he took to do it. Sometimes he'd run at the Colonel's legs and snap—and a better-behaved dog there never was, common days. Sometimes he'd pitch on another

dog, hammer and tongs, and they'd roll over and yell, and you couldn't see 'em for the dust. I got to think the other dog understood the scheme himself; for when they'd distracted the Colonel and he'd fallen on 'em with whatever came handy, the two dogs would leap apart, and the second one would go about his business and leave the Colonel's to the thrashing he was sure to get. Yes, he got it every time. 'That dog of mine,' the Colonel would say, 'he's getting quarrelsome; he's getting unmanageable. I'll break him of it, or I'll break every bone in his body.' And you'd have thought the dog's bones might have been pretty well broken, he was so cut and kicked. But he took it all like—well, as I've understood the English schoolboy takes his lickings. I won't say our schoolboys, because I understand they're not allowed to be licked. Great mistake! I was mellowed well in my time, and I was the better for it. But the dog never ki-yi-ed. He never yelped a syllable. He'd stand there and be hammered like a moth-eaten old yellow rock carved out like a dog, and he'd look absent-minded a little, as if he really didn't exactly know what was going on and certainly didn't want anybody else to. And when it was over, he'd give himself a kind of a shake and a frisk as if he meant to say: 'Splendid, Colonel. That was just splendid. Think you could do it again?'"

"Well, what's your theory of it?" the prompt young man inserted here. "Why was he so mighty fond of being biffed?"

"I don't say that he was fond of it," the old gentleman resumed, with dignity. "I say he intentionally appeared to be fond of it."

"Oh, come now," said the other. "You mean he was putting up a bluff. Why, man alive, you're talkin' about a four-footed beast! You're talking about a dog. You might as well say this dog here—" with his half-smoked cigarette he indicated Mac, twitching in a dream of sheep-herding.

"Yes," said the old gentleman, solemnly and stiffly, "you might say this dog here. Only it didn't happen to be this dog. It was another one."

"But you don't mean to say you imagine dogs are trotting round treeing psychologic moments—" he was rather a clever young man with his tongue and his trick of remembered phrases. We'd all thought so until now he interrupted the story. "Well," he persisted, "how do you account for it?"

"How do you account for it?" inquired the old gentleman, and his "it" seemed to embrace a large conception of the uncharted world dogs live in, from which they emerge mysteriously for their adventures and their benevolences in the equally obscure domain of man.

"Read us that paragraph you had," said the young man. He was frowning over an effort to capture an illusory possibility.

Annerly did it.

"Where'd you get it?" asked the ruthless one. "Did you say you wrote it?"

"I did," said Annerly. "It was the beginning of the account I meant to write of this dog and what he had to do and what he taught me."

"Ever write it?"

"No. I couldn't make it clear enough. I never've

spoken of it to any one until to-day. I suppose I shouldn't now, but he"—here, by a gesture, he seemed to include Mac in the circle—"he brought it up, and—well, I felt rather more like it."

"But we haven't had all the story," said a timid-spoken man whose flamboyant wife, from a green beyond, was waving him to tea.

"It's very short," said Annerly, as if he'd rather get it over. "It's soon told. One day in the beginning of September I took a walk up the mountain road, and when I was coming back into town I met a lot of children, a whole Pied Piper crowd of 'em, and though I'm not specially given to noticing children I did notice these, they looked so pretty. Their hats were over their eyes or falling down their backs, and their hair was anyhow, and their faces red, as if they'd run a race, and you could see well enough why. It was what they carried. They were weighted down, every one of 'em, with corn, sweet corn, big armfuls of it, and two little girls between 'em tugged a kettle, three-quarters full of water that slopped every step. When I saw the kettle, I called a halt and asked 'em to let me carry it. But they wouldn't stop more than a minute. They distrusted me, off on some child's spree as they were, like a dog's sheep-killing, and they were afraid I'd cut in and spoil it somehow. So 'twas, 'No, sir,' and, 'Thank you, sir,' and on they went. In a minute or two I overtook the Colonel and the dog, and knew he'd met 'em; but he was too far along to take much account of them, or any other pretty, innocent sight. I knew where he'd been. There was a one-armed man along the road, and he kept a choice brand of whiskey for the

fellows that didn't like to drink as much as they wanted at the hotel. The Colonel was in one of his grand moods. First thing he said was to inform me he was on his way to deliver a short account of the battle of Gettysburg, deliver it in the square. Then I knew what was coming. I knew the dog would try to quash it, and the Colonel would cut into the dog, and if I'd had a cask or something, I'd have turned it over the dog and kept him in it, breathing through the bung-hole, and saved his hide that time.

"When we got into the square I was a little easier. There was nobody there but a tin-peddler, and he'd opened a bag of hay for his horses and sat up in his cart and leaned back, having a pipe. But for all the Colonel knew, he was as good as twenty, and the Colonel got up on the band stand and opened fire on him. I guess the tin-peddler thought he was crazed. He took his pipe out of his mouth, and left his mouth open and stared a spell, and then he seemed to think it wouldn't strike that time, and leaned himself back again and went to sleep, mouth still open. I can see that picture to this day. Well, the Colonel kept on spouting, and the dog sat still, grave as a judge; seemed to think it didn't make any particular difference, long as there wasn't anybody there but a tin-peddler and me. It was a pretty hot day, and I sat down on the steps of the stand and took off my hat and hoped the Colonel thought I was listening. Far as I was concerned he might as well work off his load that way as any other, long as there was nobody to be mortified but me, and Miss Sally was indoors. It was a day full of haze, over the mountain everywhere, and I smelt

smoke and liked it. Seemed as if every man was burning up the rubbish in his own dooryard, and as if the world was going to be the cleaner for it. In another minute I might have been as fast asleep as the tin-peddler, but the dog lifted his head and gave a howl, an awful howl. If you'd heard it at night on a lonesome road you'd have put for cover. It was so awful somehow it even stopped the Colonel. And then the dog started to run, and stopped and howled again, and looked back at the Colonel, and gave that howl over and over and over, and at last we judged, both at the same time, that something had hurt him and he was in pain. The Colonel got down over the steps as quick as his legs would let him, and made for the dog, and I followed on. Not very fast. I'm lame, gentlemen, maybe you've observed. 'Something stung him?' the Colonel called back to me. 'It's more than a sting,' I said, and I knew he knew so, too. Of course the one stupid commonplace about a dog beside himself with a trouble you can't understand is that he's mad. I did think that, too, but only from a kind of reflex, caught from our dull habits of reason. Every time I saw the dog's face when he'd look round to find out if the Colonel was following, I knew it was just earnestness there. He'd got something to do and he was taking the Colonel on to help do it. And suddenly, in a second, both of us together, we knew. We smelled smoke, more and more we smelt it, and when we rounded the curve of the road we could see French's old barn, chiefly beams and rafters and a roof with shingles curled up like lichens, they were so old—just a storage-place for a good many years—and 'twas afire. I don't know what

there was in it: anything the wet would hurt and French couldn't bring himself to throw away—old sleighs, paint-pots, rolls of matting. I went over it once when I felt lazy, for it was all open to the light. I used to like to understand folks then. 'Twas in the days before I learned you can't understand 'em. I knew French had the reputation of being close, and I wanted to see what road it took. As a young man I'd had a good deal of ambition to become a writer. Well, well!" He dropped into blank musing for a moment here and then caught himself up.

"There was one upper window left in the place, and what do you think was framed in it, the smoke behind her? A little girl, gentlemen, and she was stretching out her hands to us and screaming, piercing, needle screams. I never heard anything like those screams. The Colonel started to run. He'd forgotten the dog, as well he might, for the minute the dog saw he'd got us far enough so we knew what we'd come for, he stopped howling and loped on ahead. The Colonel was a good second. You wouldn't know he'd a glass of liquor to carry. He ran like a boy. And we got nearer, and the heat of the fire struck us in the face, and the smoke came to meet us and choke our running. 'There's an old stairway,' I called to the Colonel. He was getting there first. I knew he'd have to. 'I've seen it;' and he didn't answer me, but he pelted on, and when I got to the runway and saw nothing but smoke and fire inside, he'd disappeared. I thought the dog had too, but, by George! he hadn't. He flew back at me out of the smoke and bit at my trousers and worried 'em a second; and you may call me crazy if

you like, but I knew why. He saw there was a big deed doing in there, and he meant the Colonel to be the one to do it."

"Oh, come now—" the young man pushed in, but we couldn't stop to hear him. The quiet man brought a hand down on his shoulder, and he stopped.

"Then," said Annerly, "the dog left me as quick as he had come, as if he hoped he'd given me a good broad hint but hadn't time to stop to see, other things were so pressing, and he, too, scurried into the smoke where the Colonel had gone. I was just setting my foot on the runway to go in, when I heard a voice above. It was the Colonel's. There'd been noise enough before, with the crackling of the fire and the crying of children, but the children seemed to have stopped. The Colonel had done that. He'd got up there among 'em, and they were sobbing a little, I suppose, somehow, as you do when help comes and you know, tough as things look, they can't be quite so bad now. But he was yelling at me, ordering me to look up, and I never hesitated any more than I should if I'd been in the ranks. I ran round to the side, and there he was at the one window, and the fire was behind him and beside him, and the smoke was thick and gray, bright-colored, too, here and there from the paint. But it blew away from him, so I could see everything for ten feet or so back. I don't know how to tell it, gentlemen. I haven't the words. I used to try to think how I'd write it if I was on a paper and had got to, but I couldn't think, and I can't think now. You see, the side of the barn was mostly gone. There was just the flooring of the mow, and up there was the

old stove the children had tried to light. And besides the window there were a dozen vertical gaps to right and left of it, where boards were gone, and through them I could see what went on.

"'Here,' said the Colonel. 'Here!' He lifted up a little girl by her shoulders and swung her out of the window. 'Catch!' said he, and I screamed out as the children were screaming, as a woman might. 'I can't,' I said. 'My God, I can't.' But in a second I knew he wasn't drunk any longer, and it was sober sense working in him, and that was the only way. And as I said I couldn't, I held up my arms, and he gave her another swing and let her go, and she dropped, screaming. But I got her, and got her safe and right side up, and the minute I had my hands on her tight little body I smelt my courage and I knew I could do it again. And I set her on the ground, and I had time to see, before I looked up for another, that she wasn't crying any more, and, if you will believe me, she'd put up her hands and was braiding her little yellow pigtail. Yes, I looked up, but the Colonel wasn't ready for me. He was in trouble up there. The children had got into a panic when they saw one thrown out; they were more afraid of being thrown than they were of the fire, and same time they'd got a sudden idea of the safety outside, and they were crowding forward to the cracks, and I knew they meant to jump. The Colonel was roaring at 'em as if they were a company in the thick of battle; but they couldn't mind, they couldn't even hear. That's where the dog came in. Suddenly, as sudden as the thought must have sprung up in his mind, he leaped at 'em and began to herd 'em as if they were

sheep. The Colonel saw what he was at, and yelled at him and told him to go ahead and blessed him and swore like a pirate, and the children got more scared of the dog than they'd been of the leap, and he ran back and forth before 'em, and if one made a dash he was too quick for her and sprung at her clothes and tore at 'em, and she was mighty glad to slink away. So there they were corralled, the dog in front and the fire behind—and the fire wasn't idle, mind you—and the Colonel snatched another and I caught her, and another; and I'm blest if he didn't get the whole thirteen down safe, all but little Annie Dill, and she only broke her ankle, and she's a spry, sound woman to-day, and walks as well as any of you. And when the last one was crying in mother's apron—for by now the whole village was turning out—there was the Colonel, straight and tall like a Bible prophet, and the fire was behind him, and he'd no place to go unless he jumped the same way. I saw two men running with a long ladder, and an old woman that was grandmother to one of the children kept screaming: 'Why don't you get a feather bed? Why don't you get a feather bed, so's that dear man can jump?' And there was a little puff toward us, and the wind had changed, and the ladder hadn't come, and the Colonel was in the midst of the fire and smoke. And so he leaped—for there was no other way—and the dog leaped after him. He fell straight forward on his face, the Colonel did, but we had him up in a second, and there he stood, pretty dazed, pretty well scorched; and the first thing he said was, 'All there?' He meant the children. 'All there, sir,' said I, but I don't know as he heard me,

for Miss Sally came walking through the crowd—I suppose she was too dignified for anything but a walk, but she came so fast she might as well have run—and she put her two hands on the Colonel's shoulders, and she said as well as she could for crying, 'Brother, I'm proud of you.' The Colonel was a very courtly man. He took one of her hands down from his shoulder and kissed it and said to her, 'Why, Sally, old girl, that's nothing.' But as he said it he clapped his hand and hers in it to his side, and we caught him and laid him down, and every one of us knew he never'd get up again. And he never did. He never even opened his eyes. And we carried him to Miss Sally's house, and the mothers and fathers and children followed after. But the dog trotted along by Miss Sally, head down, tail dropped, and if we could have known what he was thinking we should be wiser men to-day."

"Now I gather," said the omnivorous young man, "that you not only believe the dog scented out the danger the children were in, but you think he led the Colonel to save 'em—" Then he hesitated a moment, as if he knew the pregnant fact was farther yet behind.

"Yes, sir," Annerly said, with almost a snap of his decisive jaws, as if he'd have no questioning of such matters, "I do."

"I understand, too, I gather," said the young man, frowning over the travail of his own cleverness, "you think the dog wanted the Colonel to—to retrieve his shortcomings, as it were, by that kind of a deed."

"I think so, sir," said Annerly, as if defying him to challenge it. "I think I may say, after all the years I have given to reasoning it out, that I know so. That's

why, as I told you, the dog didn't propose I should have part nor lot in it. He meant it to be the Colonel's stunt, as it was. That dog had as clear an idea as I had of old Virginia and her pride. He meant to set her flags waving, and he did."

"What became of the dog?" hesitated the quiet man, rising. His wife had gone to the length of sending him a pencilled line by a boy.

"He lived with Miss Sally. They grew old together. And when Miss Sally died, he lived with me, and I buried him with my own hands."

Annerly rose now, and the rest of us, as if by an instinctive deference, got up with him. The young man did not find his intellectual curiosity sated.

"But what do you mean," he prosed, going back to the beginning, "by saying there's something dogs know and men don't? What is it they know?"

Annerly stood for a moment looking down, and, it was apparent, thinking. It was not easy to see whether he considered this an incommunicable secret, or whether he was wondering if it could even be approached in words. His face grew more and more gentle. Suddenly it flushed over in a lovely smile and he looked up.

"It's this, gentlemen," said he, "I think it's this. In some unexplained way dogs know that cruelty rendered unto them will be paid by suffering rendered unto man. When you hurt them they rush upon you with their divine forgiveness—at once, pellmell, because they don't want the God of all—the One that holds punishment in His hand—they don't want Him to know they're hurt. They want to save us who have hurt them. That's the way I reason it."

A GUARDED SHRINE

CONSTANCE BURTON, on her way down to Wilbraham, leaned her head against the car window and tried to clarify her problem, lest, on arriving, the solution should be at once required of her. She was a beautiful woman, judged by the canons fitted to human living. Her face had an alluring irregularity; there were complex meanings in it, veiled, some of them, by memories. Soft, loose hair drooped above her delicate brows, and her mouth had the enchanting line made by a piquant upper lip. She looked like a woman of instinctive sympathies whom life had steadily enriched. She knew the wholesome meanings of things, and she had learned them through experience. Her black clothes were plain, yet lovely; but they did not seem to be the conventional mourning. There was a plume in her soft hat, and her cloak was held by a silver clasp. She was but two months widowed, and she was going down to see her husband's mother, a stranger to her, and tell her some hard facts. How should the facts be told? To her, the wife, they brought only an exalted loyalty, an added reason for living, in that she had to complete something her husband had begun. She sat there, not letting her mind wander, but driving it relentlessly back over the six years of her married life, culling thence the portions that would fit that life as she understood it, and as his mother must be made to understand.

She had met Blaise Burton in Italy when he was studying there, and they had married after a three months' courtship. Then came his illness and the break that sent him to Davos, and the long imprisonment there with her at hand, never farther away than his voice could reach. They had been entirely happy in their snowy exile, he with but one regret: that his mother should be living out her days untended in New England. But in every letter Madam Burton begged him not to come. She would go to him, she promised, as soon as she was free. Now she had her freedom, after the death of her sister, whose illness matched his own; but at that very time had come his high-hearted rush to the valley, to be with his old chum stricken by fever, his illness there and death.

What could his wife say to illuminate those obituary notices that must have torn his mother's heart anew, adding the pang of failure to that of grief? She remembered one of the summaries from a paper that had been swift to hail him when he went into print ten years before. It was a type of all the rest. Blaise Burton was, it said, a one-book man. His earliest attempt, the Italian sketches, fine spun as gossamer, made his sole title to remembrance. The work that followed later was a futile incursion into fields where giants only are strong enough to tread. He had made an unwise choice. He had belied the promise of his early days.

That concurrent testimony roused her to hot loyalty. She knew the dreams and longings out of which that work was born. She had met, hand in hand with him, the visions that stirred him to his rapt interest in the soul of things, his passion to depict it justly. While he

lived, they walked, they two, amid the shows of life, oblivious of them, their eyes upon the dawn. They had forgotten, in their devotion to what shall be, their lack of recognition from the things that are. But to his mother in her New England solitude, he must have been a man of fame; or rather, he had been, until these chilling estimates enlightened her. How could she be made to understand how his life transcended all he seemed to do, and that his rush toward light blew back the flame he carried? How was it possible to show her on what solid ground his name might yet be set?

Constance descended at the station in the light of the later afternoon. Wilbraham, a college town, had a curious blending of life in its elm-shaded streets. There was the quiet of an ancient spot where tradition had been transmitted unchanged from generation to generation, and flickering about it, like sunlight on still water, the life of youth. Ample houses slept there in colonial calm, and boys went trotting past them, eyes set forward and hands clenched. There was a placid river between two lines of trees, and bare-armed athletes strained upon it, to the beat of oars.

Constance took one glance at the wide horizon before she found herself invited by a bony, white-haired woman leaning from a chaise.

"I won't leave the hoss," the woman called. "Should you just as soon hand your check to Timothy Peters? Timothy, you take this check, an' bring her trunk along next time you come."

Timothy, a lank denizen, accepted the check, and eyed the traveller with an air of just appraisement. Constance knew at once that she was "Blaise's widder"

to the village. Blaise had told her all its little annals, how they were sown and garnered.

"You git right in here," said the woman, and when Constance complied, old White rocked sleepily away.

"You must be Mary King," said Constance.

"How'd you know?" asked Mary, in quick delight. "I guess he must ha' told ye."

"Yes, he told me. He told me about making candy in the kitchen."

"Way over there in Europe, he told you that?"

"Yes; and how you hid him under the eight-legged table when he didn't want to go to school."

Mary chuckled in proud retrospect. Then her face clouded. "We had high times," she said, "high times in them days."

They loitered along the High Street, with its spacious houses, none better than another, and turned in at the driveway of one great place. Constance leaned far out of the carriage to look. It seemed as if he might be by to welcome her, so often had they taken this journey hand in hand and rejoiced at their home-coming.

"There's the big lilac," she said to herself.

But Mary heard, and her old eyes were dimmed.

"And the horse-block and the mulberry-tree," said Constance. "I believe that's the path to the gooseberry patch and the old well."

"There's Mis' Burton on the door-step," said Mary, and dropped the reins. Old John was coming from the stable, his thin face keen with interest. Constance smiled her recognition at him, and immediately there were tears in his eyes, too.

Madam Burton stood there on the steps, framed by the honeysuckle trellis. She was a stately woman, with the beauty born of a large-featured significance veiled by the placidity of age. She made no pretence at dressing in a modern way. Her black silk was even severe in its plain waist and the fall of the gathered skirt. She wore a lawn kerchief and a cap. Constance, seeing Blaise's look in her, was shaken. Tears were rare visitants with her, but when she stepped to the door-stone where the old lady was awaiting her, they were running down her cheeks. The mother took her hands and seemed to steady her.

"There, dear, there!" she said. "Come right in."

Constance followed her. The moment was poignant and yet comforting. There was pain in it, and a homely pleasure she had not felt since Blaise had died. Every corner of the house, as it saluted her, brought its pang of welcome. It had stood unchanged since he saw it, and now she almost heard his laugh and touched the bitter memory of his talk about it. She was comforted in that she seemed about to come upon him, and yet smitten by a keen, new heat of pain because, amid so many voices, his was still.

She sank on the sofa in the great living room, and drew Madam Burton down beside her. There they sat for a moment with clasped hands, the mother recognizing the tension of this homecoming, and visibly soothing her through an attitude of mind. Constance caught her breath once or twice, and then controlled herself.

"No, Mary, I'll take her up myself," said Madam Burton, when Mary King appeared expectantly.

Constance rose with her, and they went slowly up the stairs.

"This is his room," said Madam Burton, pausing at the east-chamber door. There was no question whether Constance was to occupy it, though no small adornments had been added to fit her needs. She stepped in, and Madam Burton followed her. Constance looked about in a recognition of it as a part of him, and the older woman's mind seemed to accompany hers, gently and with an unspoken but always reassuring commentary. There were his boyish trophies on the wall, the hunting-crop, snow-shoes, the photographs of his mates, and the big portrait of the dog that died.

"Supper will be at six," said Madam Burton, "but there's no hurry, if you'd rather lie down a while."

Then she went away, closing the door behind her, and leaving Constance, as the wife subtly felt, alone with a most dear possession: the boy whom she had never known, save through his own careless testimony. But she avoided any impulsive survey of the room, lest she should exhaust her legacy too quickly, and in half an hour she was down-stairs again, telling Madam Burton about her voyage. Then there was supper, exquisitely served in a quiet room where the light struck through the grape-vine trellis, and a little later Constance found herself sitting on the veranda with Madame Burton, conscious that the moment had come for them to talk, and, most probably, for her own justification of the dead against the tongues of men.

The place, growing old in an honored security, had a peacefulness as mellow as the foreign lands she knew. The sounds of temperate life were sweet to her. She

heard the subdued clink of Mary's dishes from the kitchen, and the intermittent murmur of her voice talking to the other maid. John was pottering about the stable, going back and forth with a pail, and, she noticed, with a responsive liking, taking wistful glances at her now and then, as something most immediate to the house. Indeed, the place, even after his years of absence, seemed haunted by the young master still.

"I must take you into the attic to-morrow," said Madam Burton, suddenly. She had thrown a white shawl about her shoulders, and now she drew the corner up over her head. So draped, she was majestic in a gentle way, and Constance, turning to answer her, felt the wonder awakened by old age that sees its road and yearns not backward.

"I want to go everywhere," she answered.

"All his little things are there," said Madam Burton. "I began to look them over a week ago. Then I thought I'd let them be till you came, and we'd do it together."

"His baby things?"

"Yes; and some he wore when he was a boy. He had a braided jacket—"

"I know. That was the time the other boys called him Mary Ann, and he came home and chopped his curls off."

Madam Burton laughed. "Yes," said she, "that was the time. I never shall forget his poor little freckled face, all over tears. He took the kitchen knife and made a slash across the braid. I have always kept the jacket. He felt so bad. I felt bad, too."

"But you took him up to town next morning," said Constance, justifyingly, "and had his hair shingled,

and brought him a real boy's suit with trouser pockets."

The erring mother smiled. "Yes, I did," said she. "I made up as soon as I could."

"What else is in the attic?" asked Constance, softly.

"A good many of his clothes, dear. I never could seem to throw away his clothes till he grew so big they looked like other folk's. He had a little raglan. You don't know what a raglan was? They were old-fashioned even then."

"A kind of outside garment, wasn't it?"

"Yes; a queer little coat. This was checked, with lots of buttons. That was when he was a mite of a thing. And one day we walked—it's a mile beyond here—to the place where old Silas Edes took daguerreotypes. Silas never believed in newfangled things. If you mentioned photographs to him, he'd swear most distressingly."

"So you walked there—"

"Yes, my dear. Blaise had his picture taken in his raglan, and he was so proud you can't think. When we came away, nothing would do but he must carry it. So I let him; but it fell out of the little pocket, and we had to go back half the way for it. He didn't cry that time. His lips quivered, but he held them tight."

Old John came out of the barn and advanced to the veranda rail. He spoke to Madam Burton, but he looked at Constance.

"Maybe I'd better have old Hornblende up from the pastur' to-morrer," he said. "Maybe she'd like to see him."

"Yes," said Madam Burton, "have him up."

"Horse he rode constant, last year he was to home," John explained, rather chokingly. "Horse seemed to understand every word was said to him. I'll have him up."

Constance rose and leaned upon the rail. She spoke eagerly.

"No," said she. "Let me go down. I want to see the brook where the spearmint grows. I've got to drink out of the spring."

John's face grew fuller with the moving blood. "There!" said he to Madam Burton, and she nodded at him. "We'll go down 'long about ten," he said to Constance, and turned away toward the stable again, shaking his head and carrying on a commendatory dialogue with himself.

At once Constance felt that the young master's house had accepted her. But instead of settling down into its peace, she had still her task to do, and she broke into it with the haste sprung from enforced delay.

"Have you read what the papers say of him?" she asked, abruptly.

The older woman inclined her head. "Some of them," she answered. "Yes, a good many. You know he subscribed to quite a number of foreign ones for me."

Constance dared her plunge. "They say he failed," she said, with a note of bitterness.

"Yes," returned the mother, gently. "I know."

The young wife's mind supplied the counter-question, "And don't you care?" But she did not put it. Instead, she began her prearranged defence with one of the commonplaces that she had thought might serve.

"I don't know whether you were prepared for it?"

"My dear," said the other woman, still with that compliant dignity, "when people are as old as I am, they don't prepare. They take things as they come." Then, answering the baffled look on the young wife's face, she continued, as if she refrained from directing the talk into ways it was not meant to take: "He worked quite hard these last years?"

It was a question, and Constance returned hotly: "It was not so much work. It was a fight. You know, dear—" She paused, and remembering she had lost her own mother too early to make the transference of the word a disloyalty, wondered if she might adventure it.

"I wish you would," said Madam Burton.

Constance thanked her with a look. "I don't believe you guessed how he changed, how the whole bent of his mind altered up there in the last years. His letters didn't tell you. They were too personal. Don't you know how he used to fill them with every-day gossip, —what we were doing, how the latest patient behaved, and those marginal drawings, enough to make a mummy laugh?"

"They were good letters," said the mother.

"Yes; but you had to find the intimate part of him in his work. And his work was scattered, in America, in England, everywhere. He besieged the journals with poems, essays; but what he wrote was too unpopular ever to be collected. So no one can sit down to turn his pages, volume after volume, and say, 'He was this or that.' We can't prove anything about him.

They won't let us." Her face kindled with heat engendered by her fighting spirit.

"What do you want to prove, my dear?" asked the other woman.

"I want to prove that he was not a man of one book, but many,—not judging by quantity, mind you. No! By actual achievement. Just think! This was what he did. He went to Italy and wrote those color sketches. If he had pinned himself down to that kind of work, nobody would have had enough of him. There would have been sets of him in boxes, and people would be babbling about his style. But no! he went up there into the mountains and began to live. He dealt with nations then, not individuals. It was England's Eastern policy that inflamed him first; he poured his blood into those sonnets. He saw America forswearing her old aloofness, and pitched in. More sonnets, and the essays called 'The Lost Atlantis'. Well, they hated him. The people that spoke his own tongue abjured him. It was a literary ostracism. England was too hot with the heat of battle to hear reproof without calling it traitorous in any man of English speech. America was too fat with money and crude, hurtling power—"

She choked, and thoughts came faster than her words. This was as she had imagined herself speaking before audiences that were willing to see him rehabilitated. But great as was the tide within her, it found itself stilled by the extreme quiet of his mother, whom she had meant to comfort. It seemed at the moment as if the other woman had not felt the popular dumbness as she had done. It might even be that she had not felt it at all. But she was speaking:

"He had a following, I think?"

"Oh yes, he had a following of the malcontents that are always on the other side. They liked to call him 'one of us'. But don't you see, mother, his own people, the men of letters, they didn't take the trouble to find out what he was doing. They sat down and bemoaned those little cameos because there weren't more of them. They wouldn't take the trouble to understand him. They clogged his way with their numbing silence, their foolish laughter—."

"You feel this very keenly," said Madam Burton.

This time Constance dared her question: "Don't you feel it?"

But Madam Burton hardly seemed to hear.

"You think," she pursued, "he was unpopular because he spoke the truth?"

"Because he spoke the honest truth, as he saw it hour by hour. He wasn't always right. No! But his intention was colossal. He should have been judged by that. But they didn't want to be flagellated and scorched and scarred. They wanted little pocket volumes they could read on the train. People are shy of big intentions. They don't tolerate them, except in the standard classics."

Madam Burton had another question to put, and she essayed it apprehensively. "Did he—" she hesitated. "Do you think he felt this deeply?"

"Not for a moment. He was too big. He was only—what shall I say?—a little wistful over it. Once he did say: 'They mustn't make me self-conscious. They mustn't weaken my sword-arm.' No! he was above the clouds. But I—I wasn't, though it's only

since he—since it happened, that I've grown so hot about it. You see, up there with him, it didn't seem to matter. Besides, I'd always had a hope they would recognize him at last. When the notices came out, I turned to them for the only comfort life could give me. But I didn't get it. He was a man who had at one time shown promise. That was what they said."

Madam Burton rose and drew her shawl about her. "Let us take a step in the garden," she suggested, and Constance followed her. They went down the path to the long, sweet-smelling enclosure, and paced gravely between borders rich with flowers, the mother leaning on her daughter's arm. Down by the gnarled apple-tree at the foot Madam Burton stopped and pointed out a patch of ladies'-delights in the enfolding sward. "That's Timmie's grave," she said.

"The spaniel?"

"Yes. Blaise buried him himself, and then stole into the house and asked me to come and sing 'Sister, thou wast mild and lovely.' I did it. He piped up too, with his little, clear voice. We never spoke of it afterwards, even when he was grown up. It had gone too deep."

They turned back again, and then Madam Burton suddenly continued, with a bright rallying of spirit that illumined her: "Well, daughter, what are we going to do about it?"

"About him? His memory?"

"Yes."

"There is but one thing for me to do. Write his life, collect his papers, publish them at my own expense.

Say to the world, 'This was the man you shut your ears to.'"

"Would he want you to?"

Constance halted at a spot where the fragrance of honeysuckle scented the air and great red poppies lay around, bursting with bloom.

"No," she said, in frank avowal; "he'd laugh at me. He never took back tracks in his life. He never reconsidered what was done. He only pressed on to the goal that was before him."

"Yes," said the mother, quietly, "I know."

"But don't you see, mother," the girl cried, with an added passion, "what the goal proved to be? An unlamented death, an obscure grave."

"Not lamented?"

At that moment John, having finished his work, came out upon the back veranda, and Mary followed him. They took chairs there, and sat in quiet talk together. The two women in the garden knew their minds were busy over this homecoming and the absent master of the house.

"Yet," said Constance, after they had exchanged a glance over that pregnant byplay, "I want to build a monument to him. You wrote me you had put up a stone to him in the churchyard here. I want this to be my stone."

"Yes, I put up the stone; but Blaise doesn't lie there. No matter where the real man lies. And as for the goal —" she looked inevitably up at the sky where a star was shining. "Well—" she said, and could not finish.

"You want I should bring you somethin' thicker to put on?" called Mary from the porch.

Madam Burton smiled. "No," said she,—adding to Constance: "That is Mary's way of ordering me in. I do get stiff. It's a silly piece of business, this growing old."

"Let us go in," said Constance, with quick solicitude.

"We might as well. I want to take you up to my room. There are one or two things there you'd like to see. I'll go up first, my dear, and get a light." But while Constance lingered in the hall, Mary King came through the dining-room and beckoned. Constance followed her back to the kitchen, and there Mary took from her pocket a little worn card, and held it solicitously out between her thumb and finger.

"I didn't want her to see it," she whispered. "She never knew there was such a thing. It's just as well not."

Constance took the card and bent over it by the light of the candle. When she looked up, Mary King nodded triumphantly and smiled.

"It's a reward of merit," said she. "The first he ever got."

Constance looked again at the glazed surface, where, under a moss rosebud, was her husband's name, with the date of a long-past year.

"He wa'n't no bigger'n a pint o' cider," continued Mary King, in swelling chronicle, "when he come home that afternoon with this held out in his hand, as budge as you please. 'Here, Mary,' says he, 'here's my reward of merit. You can have it if you want to. Where's the cookies?'" Mary chuckled. "'Where's the cookies?'" she repeated, as if the words were golden grain. "If I hadn't kep' over the rollin'-

pin pretty stiddy, he'd ha' eat us out o' house an' home."

"So he gave it to you!" said Constance. Her eyes were wet and her mouth trembled.

"Yes. His mother was in York State makin' a visit, an' when she come back he never thought on't again. But I kept it nice, in among my things."

"Coming, Constance?" Madam Burton called.

"Thank you, Mary," said the girl, giving back the card. "I'm glad you showed it to me."

Mary nodded, and holding it in one careful hand, took her way toward the kitchen, while Constance ran up-stairs.

Madam Burton was in the west chamber, where there was provision for all weathers: a great fireplace for the cold, with chintz-covered furniture and floating curtains to fit the summer. There were a few old-fashioned pictures, a Landseer, a Reynolds, and peacock feathers drooped over the glass. The room offered an impression of unconsidered furnishing, as if things not wanted in the rest of the house had drifted there for refuge. Yet it had an air of comfort. It was a mother's room. There were two lighted candles on the dressing-table, and Madam Burton, standing before them in her graceful slenderness, the shawl dropping from her shoulders, turned with an inviting gesture. Constance joined her there, and the other woman laughed in a sweet deprecation.

"It's so silly, dear," she said, "but I came across it to-day. It's a valentine he made for me when he was only ten. He cut the letters out of an old label that came on some sort of fancy goods. See! 'Mother—

Pure sole.' He couldn't spell it right, poor dear. The letters didn't run to it."

The two women looked at each other and smiled with that whimsical mirth which is not merriment, but love. The mother in them was alive. At that moment they both felt in the room the presence of the shadowy third—the little boy grown up so long ago. Then they sat down together by the table. Madam Burton began abruptly:

"It isn't that I don't sympathize with what you intend to do. It's only that I don't want you to be disappointed if it doesn't come out the way you expect."

"You think people may not read his papers if I get them together?"

"They may not. At least, not with your eyes. You see, my dear, we have to learn that there are two parties to what we say—the one that speaks, the one that hears. Well, Blaise may never have found any one to hear."

"I don't believe you care whether they listen or not," said Constance, with an illuminating comprehension.

Madam Burton laid one delicate hand on hers.

"Not much, dear," she answered, lightly. "Not very much."

"You think he did his work!"

"I know he did. We both know it."

"And that is enough!"

Madam Burton rose and put out the candles with a charming motion full of her gentlewoman's grace.

"It seems a pity to have a light, these summer nights," she said. "Come to the window. We can talk better there."

They stepped up into the recess made by the curving glass, and stood a moment before sitting down on the cushioned seat. For Constance there was suddenly a sense of richness and of peace. She was here in his home, hung with countless memories of him like a wall curtained with pictures. The child was here, the little boy who had grown into the man she loved. In the almost tangible presence of his memory, bounded achievement fell away from him and left him mother-naked, a creature of exquisite mortality, on his way from world to world, lightly scorning to give the victor's hail to frame. He had become a citizen of the universe, not of one exacting spot where names are writ in water or in brass, but still in an imperfect script that may or may not fit the universal tongue. It was not so much that he was reft from earth as released from it, and dowered with swifter wings for love and worship. She was warm at the heart with the nearness of him. Recalled by the passing of an emotion too poignant to be long continued, she glanced at his mother, who stood there, hands clasped in front of her and head thrown back, her eyes upon a star.

"I wonder," said the older woman, thrillingly—"I wonder what he is doing now!"

THE DISCOVERY

THE young man and woman, both of them journalists, met at the station that April morning, on their way out of town. The day was wonderful even in the city, all nebulous prophecy, and they two, though they were going on urgent business, had the eager holiday look of those who are called to green fields. They met with the nod of casual friendship common to workmen in kindred paths, and yet each face brightened for an instant and reflected pleasure from the other. An observer would have called them a couple in the old, intimate sense of the word, very handsome, full to the brim of purpose, and with some deed before them. It was only when they were seated in the car that Hallett, the young man, began to talk.

"It's really a discovery, Lucy? Your note wasn't explicit."

"It's a discovery. I found it out by the slightest chance, and I'm so proud. I met Tommy Atwood. He asked me if it was true that you were doing a monograph on Cecil Milner. I said 'yes.'"

"Tommy couldn't even imagine doing it. He'd rather report a fireman's ball."

"So he implied. 'Better a living personal than a dead author,' he said. 'Milner, too, of all the swells! Hallett'll have to read a complete set, won't he?'"

"I suppose you didn't mention it was the biggest thing that ever happened to me?"

"Oh no! Tommy couldn't take that in. He hasn't room. But he said, 'I was in the same town with Milner once,—little country place where he was spending the summer.'"

"Road End!"

"Yes. And then he went on: 'Queer, wasn't it, that he should go down there to a house party and elect to stay in that little cottage at the turn of the lane?'"

"What! he didn't stay at the Taylors' at all?"

"No, sir! he stayed by himself in a little house inhabited by a 'widow lady,' Tommy says,—a widow lady named Pratt. Tommy remembers the name because, though he had only an hour or so there that summer, he tried to get an interview with Milner, and failed."

Hallett looked at her in a frank disgust over his own density, and she returned the glance from as candid a pleasure at her own chance for supplementing his wits.

"Yes," she said, "we were stupid, both of us. But how could we think he went down for a house party and didn't stay at the house? How could we dream that when Mrs. Taylor and everybody connected with that summer seem to have died or gone mad—how could we dream there was a widow lady named Pratt living down there to enlighten us?"

"You don't know she's living?"

"No. I haven't dared look that in the face. She must be living. No All-Wise Providence would flaunt such a chance as this and then say it's only irony."

Hallett relapsed into astonishment.

"Well," he said, at length, as the train ran out into the open country, all a green mist of leaves, "nobody could have thought it. Nobody *would* have thought it," he added, frowningly, as if he justified his own laggard wits. "Everybody who might reasonably have been connected with that summer is dead—"

"Except Felicia May. And she's married and swallowed up in India. You couldn't say to her, anyway: 'You that were Felicia May, I gather that Cecil Milner was in love with you. Kindly tell me what he said, and what broke it off, and whether that hastened his death.' No; Tommy Atwood could say that, but not you. There are limits."

Thereafter until they reached the sweet-smelling little country town they both meditated, each in a different key. Lucy, who pursued every line to a finish, who from mere curiosity over life turned all the stones she saw, sat upright, her hazel eyes dark with the excitement of a fortunate issue. Hallett, long, lank, with sallow cheek, and dark eyes shrouded in a melancholy of inherited temperament, brooded on the misfortune of his own nature, which always led him into meditation over the abstract to the neglect of the obvious. But he, too, was aglow, and with a warm gratitude to her because she had again, as she so often did in their fraternal pursuits, turned him into the channel of evident values. Thinking that, he spoke suddenly and with fervor:

"Lucy, you're a dear!"

She flashed round on him her own look of personal gratitude. She was like a trusty comrade, always retrieving for him morsels of the practical advantage

he was not quite equipped to hunt alone. But for his own talent she had a vivid glow of admiration. She could pounce on the incidents of Milner's life. Hallett could reproduce, with clear, faithful touches, the complexion of Milner's genius, perhaps even his soul before they had done with him; and by dint of such wonderfully shaded paths, shaded and watered if she could manage it, he would one day leap out of journalism into a recognized success, and, before he was fifty, the world might find in him another Milner. For a moment she lost herself in her dream, and then Road End was called, and they alighted at the lonely station, where there were sky, a horizon line amply removed, and sweet air to breathe. Mrs. Pratt was living, though they did not put their question in that form, and not so far away, the station-master told them. Did they see the big house on the hill? It was impossible to ignore its audacity, all stuccoed towers. Well, Mrs. Pratt lived about half a mile farther along on the little cross-road under the knoll. Then they stepped out on their quest. They had both been born in the country, and the day and the year were young enough to convey them into the happy illusion that they were on their way to school, dinner pail in hand and the fearful gleam of examination day before them. Even in their kindred daily pursuits they had never felt so at one. Perhaps it was Hallett who suddenly came upon a recognition of it, thrown back, with this pleasant little jolt, into a simple life where to love a girl as he loved Lucy was to act upon it. Lucy did not need to recognize their bond. She had always felt it, only it suited her humble acceptance of him to translate the one

great fact that held them with a silent potency into any kind of service. He looked at her from time to time in a puzzled way, as if he were beginning to realize her; but she did not look at him. Her mind was practically on Cecil Milner. At an imposing foolish gateway leading to a tree-bordered avenue, the curve of which denied the eye any real vista, they stopped. This was the avenue to Mrs. Taylor's great house, where, though Cecil Milner had not stayed, he had at least been every day or many times a day, all through that final summer. Hallett laid his hand on the gate and glanced at her.

"We must go in, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes." Her face, as well as her assenting tone, showed that this had been one of her purposes for him. "I suppose there are invisible portraits of him now all along here where he used to pass."

That gave Hallett at once, with his sensitiveness to suggestion, a feeling that Milner was there with them, and lent the place something solemn and austere. The avenue in its ample sweep, where the lateral shrubbery had encroached and the tree tops had met overhead, began to seem to them both like a jungle or an enchanted wood where they were penetrating, breathless, to some unknown end. At length, with a sharper curve, they came out on the house, remarkable for its pomp and the amount of building material put into use with a consistent wrongheadedness almost admirable. It told one tale—money, money everywhere, and the personal bodily comfort which had fatuously dared to reign without allowing the eye one glorious right. The two young pilgrims looked at each other.

"How could he?" Hallett exclaimed, with an intensity of wonder she echoed.

"Visit here, you mean?"

"Visit a woman who could stand for a pile like this."

"Felicia May was here."

"You think that was the bid he made for her?"

"I know it." She spoke with entire conviction.

"And lost! Poor chap! poor chap!" At once Milner seemed more pathetically human to them. After they had regarded the uncouth blunder of architecture for some time in a helpless languor, Hallett said feebly,—"Well, we might as well be getting along."

"Yes. Mrs. Pratt can't have this to offer."

They found Mrs. Pratt in her garden, a little square enclosure bounded by the neatest picket fence of yellow. She was a slim, bright-eyed old lady with a cap such as Lucy had seen in her childhood and never since, even as a picturesque survival,—a lace affair fitted to the head and trimmed with narrow ribbon in zigzag tracks, culminating in two plump rosettes well over the ears. She came forward to the gate almost as soon as they were in view, and waited, trowel in hand and a smile on her keen old face.

"I ain't surprised," she called, in a triumphant quaver. "I dropped my dishcloth, and the cat was washin' her face—the land! so it ain't you, after all."

This was so patent a downfall that Lucy began to hurry, as if she might allay disappointment by being there the sooner. She looked into the old woman's face with her pretty, sympathetic smile.

"But we came to see you," she said, engagingly. "Who did you think we were?"

Mrs. Pratt's face relaxed, and she seemed to accept the good-will of the exchange.

"Why, I thought you was sister Mary's Charlie and Adelaide. How far have you travelled, dear?"

Hallett stood in the background, poking at the bouncing-bet outside the fence, and wishing for a moment he had the entry to some of Lucy's easy and direct ways of meeting men and women. But then he found his cheek suddenly warm, and looked at her with a little smile. It seemed quite as well that she should use her aptness for them both. Lucy was speaking, telling their errand without a single hesitating flourish.

"We came to find you because you knew Mr. Cecil Milner. He stayed with you one summer."

The old lady was holding open the gate.

"Come right in," she said, and in a moment they were walking up the path, where a cat, with her tail mast high, was walking down to meet them. "Get away, Trotty," said Mrs. Pratt. "There! I don't suppose you'd turn out for the queen." She brushed Trot aside with a gentle firmness and a manifest pride in her feline will, and when they had reached the porch, where jessamine grew in waving garlands, looked inquiringly at the two inviting chairs.

"Yes," said Lucy at once, "let's sit here. It's such a splendid day."

Hallett took the step and began acquaintance with Trot, who was wiping fur off her sleek sides by a back and forth weaving against his trouser-leg, purring her satisfaction meantime.

'You set right down," said Mrs. Pratt. "I've got some nice root beer."

Presently Lucy had off her hat, and they were all, except Trot, drinking beer very happily. The old lady set down her glass.

"You friends of his?" she asked. There was a sudden added keenness in her eyes. Lucy wondered if the reporter had haunted her door.

"We never saw him, either of us," she said, with an instant candor. "But we admire, we love what he has written almost more than anything else. Just think! you had him a whole summer!"

The suddenness of that sympathetic onslaught found its response. The old lady's face brightened. It took on a dry, shrewd smile.

"'Twas a kind of a pleasant summer," she said.

"I suppose he used to sit here on this very porch and talk," said Lucy, cleverly.

Hallett looked at the ground, and felt as if a crystal were forming and as if he, moving, might jar the atoms.

"Oftentimes," said Mrs. Pratt.

"Now, if I were you, I suppose I should remember every word he said. You see, I like him so."

Mrs. Pratt took off her spectacles and held them in one hand. It seemed as if in the resultant haze she could think better.

"Some things I remember," she said, "I used to plan to set out everything in the spring, but he was possessed to have me do it in the fall."

"Oh, in the garden?"

"Yes. 'Twas all about the gardin." Mrs. Pratt looked a mild surprise. "You see, 'twas summer time when he was here, and that made it natural to think about the gardin. He started that poppy bed."

"That poppy bed!" Lucy was looking at it with instant reverence—a neat oblong where light-green leaves were showing.

"No, no, dear," said Mrs. Pratt. "Not them same plants, though they did come from the seed I saved from his. He sowed it in that very place the fall he was here, not long before he went away."

Lucy feared lest the thin trickle of reminiscence might find a boulder or choke itself in sand.

"Was Trot here that summer?" she asked, idiotically, because Trot at that moment essayed a paw on her knee.

"Oh yes, Trot was a kitten then. Nice kitten as ever you see."

"Did he like her?"

"Well, I don't recollect," said Mrs. Pratt, musingly, and they could see that she was considering Trot's past to the exclusion of Cecil Milner's. "I guess so. Most folks do like a nice kitten same as Trot was."

Lucy had cast a daring eye backward into the entry.

"Mrs. Pratt," she ventured, "where did he sleep? Which was his room?"

Mrs. Pratt began to laugh noiselessly.

"Well," said she, "seems funny to tell, but he slept in the shed chamber."

"The shed chamber!"

"Yes. 'Twas a cool summer that year, and when he see the shed chamber nothin' would do but he must have it. 'Tis kind of long and low, an old ancient sort of a place. I offered to move out my wheel and the little flax-wheel, but he wouldn't hear to't. So he had his trunk in there and a good big table—we fetched

that up out o' the shed, he and me,—and he seemed to think 'twas fixed complete."

"Is it just as it was?" Lucy asked, in a throbbing haste. "Oh, Mrs. Pratt, you haven't changed it!"

Mrs. Pratt nodded her head in what looked like a slow-coming triumph. It seemed evident that she had a set of feelings neatly concealed, but that she kept them burnished to a state of great intensity, and that when she did bring them out they might really dazzle. She went on:

"Up in the cupboard is his papers—"

"His papers?" Lucy gasped.

Mrs. Pratt nodded.

"There's some he was workin' on the very day he went away. Them pages were on the floor. I picked 'em up and saved 'em."

"Where are they?" asked Lucy, sharply.

Mrs. Pratt regarded her with mildness.

"Why," said she, "they're up there in the corner cupboard."

Lucy half rose from her seat. She found herself breathless.

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Pratt, with a sympathetic gentleness. "Why, yes, dear, you can see 'em if you want."

Now Hallett was on his feet, and in a dazed way he and Lucy followed through the kitchen and up to the shed chamber. Mrs. Pratt opened the door and went bustling in, as if there might be deeds to do before it was fit to welcome them, and they stood at the sill with an according reverence, Hallett looking over Lucy's shoulder, her hand in his. It was a shadowy room full

of beautiful shapes, from the old-fashioned bed, a carved four-poster, to the spinning-wheel in the corner and the little flax-wheel under the eaves. Mrs. Pratt, looking from the room to them with some apologetic sense of its having been dusted at least a week ago, became newly aware of the measure the place meant to them.

"Why!" she said. "Why, there! Well, come in. You set here, if you want, and I'll run down and see about dinner. I'm goin' to have you stop." But before she went she threw open the door of the narrow corner cupboard. "They're in there," she said, "the papers. You can look at 'em if you want. You'll know how to treat 'em; but I guess they ain't of value to anybody but me. Now, Trot, you come along downstairs. You needn't think you're goin' to poke your nose into everything that's goin'." But again, after one of her futile starts, she stopped to say, "That bundle in there directed to him is what come after he went away."

Lucy made a noiseless rush to the cupboard and took out an oblong package done up in brown paper and addressed, in a woman's hand, to Cecil Milner, Esquire.

"You never sent it to him!" she cried.

"He said not to," Mrs. Pratt returned. "He left kind of sudden. I always thought he had news from somewhere, bad news maybe, and he says, 'Mrs. Pratt, you send on the letters if the postmaster lets any slip by him, but there's a bundle of proof comin',' he says, 'any minute, and you needn't bother about that.' He said he should see 'em at the office on the way, and he'd have 'em strike off some more—"

"Yes! yes!" the two listeners found themselves saying together. "Yes!"

"So it come, and I've always kep' it up here. I kinder liked to see his name on the bundle." Again she returned to add: "Seems if I was rememberin' more and more of what he used to talk about. One thing we used to thresh out by the hour. I tell you we had it hot and heavy."

"What was it?" Lucy asked.

"Tongues and sounds. He never could abide 'em. I made him as good a butter sauce as ever you see, but he said they were—well, I dunno' exactly what he did say. But he made it up on beet greens."

She was really gone. Lucy and Hallett looked at each other a full minute. He was pale and she was flaming red. Then, together, they went forward to the corner cupboard and she waited for him to take down a sheet of paper covered with the beautiful precise hand they knew. He pored over it a moment. She could wait no longer.

"What is it!" she asked.

"The 'Gate of Horn'. The middle of the story, where she goes to France."

"Ah! then he'd copied it. That package, Hallett! That's not proof."

"What is it?" asked Hallett, stupidly.

"Proof never was sent like that. Look at the handwriting. Look at the seal." As she spoke, her clever audacious fingers were slipping the string.

He was aghast.

"You're not going to open it?"

"Why shouldn't I? He hasn't a relation on earth.

As for his friends—if we're not friends, adorers!" The edge of the seal cracked neatly upward. She put in a testing thumb and finger and drew forth a letter. Hallett stood apart, watching her. It seemed to him, as to her, as if they were in some strange new world where property rights were logical, and he who could estimate a thing like this was the one to own it.

"It's his handwriting," he offered, his voice choking with the thought.

"Yes. And there's no postmark. These letters weren't mailed. They were put under a stone in the Taylor grounds, in the foolish old way, or they were slipped into a hand—"

"Is that her name on the envelope?"

"Yes. And it begins," said Lucy in a clear, high voice, "the letter begins, 'Dearest.' Read it." She spread it before him, and together they read. Here Cecil Milner had poured out his heart to a woman he loved. This was the first letter, the beginning of his revelation to her. He told her, in swift, clear phrases, what it had been to him to find her. It had been first a flood of light. The light had illuminated his poor house of life. How plain a place it was for her to enter! But she must enter, be its architect and builder, or the house itself would fall. His way of telling it all, quite simply as he did it, was perhaps like a description of sunrise by a poet who had only just seen the sun. He had been writing about love all his life, he told her, writing and thinking about it, and he had awaited it, too, for himself, in an expectation not so very calm. Now here she was, the figure in his dream. She stood there with that sun flooding her; and she was real.

They finished reading together, like race-horses flying and coming neck and neck to the end, his dear name signed after a protestation their eyes blinded to see. Hallett had been holding the sheet. He put it carefully into its folds and laid it down, his hands trembling.

"Lucy!" he whispered. "Lucy!"

She was in his arms and their lips had touched. It was Hallett, always before this the unpractical, dreaming one, who thought first of possibilities.

"A house couldn't cost much if it's no bigger than this," he said, with certainty.

"No."

"You don't want to live in town?"

She shook her head, and then mutely dropped it to his shoulder. But in a moment she remembered Cecil Milner. She withdrew from her lover and took up the letter from the table, holding it delicately, as if its right to be guarded gave it new fragility.

"What shall we do about it?" she asked.

His eyes had travelled to the package, open at the end now and showing the torn edges of other envelopes.

"There are twelve, at least," he answered. "What a haul for Tommy Atwood!"

"What a haul for anybody!"

"But he's the only one with the infernal cleverness to get them."

"Mrs. Pratt won't let him. Can't you see she adored Cecil Milner?"

"Ah, well, he'd find arguments even for her. Let him once smell it out and he'd have some specious reason, for needing it—all for Milner's good, his name or fame or something."

"Perhaps you need them, Hal."

"I do need them." He meant it furiously. "I need his heart, the core of his heart, if I'm to write a life of him."

"Hallett, you're not going to print them?"

She hung upon his answer, as if it might weld them or part them forever. Hallett looked at her with his wide, unworldly gaze. It held surprise that she could ask.

"No," he said. "Why, no!"

She gave a little nod, all satisfaction.

"They're not safe here," he added, frowningly.

"Shall we have her up and tell her what we've done?"

"Yes. We've got to."

Lucy stepped to the head of the stairs.

"Mrs. Pratt!" she called.

They heard her moving about the kitchen with a brisk lightness. Presently she answered the call and came up, a kitchen knife in her hand, her face bearing some signs of vexation. But it was not for them.

"Sometimes seems to me, I never'll try to use an old potato," she declared. "But what's anybody going to do—new ones not come and old ones as they be? It's betwixt hay and grass with them, as 'tis with everything else."

Hallett began, and Lucy admired the crisp decision of his tone.

"Mrs. Pratt, we opened that package."

The old lady's eyes snapped once, whether in anger or not it was impossible to say.

"Well!" she remarked, and waited. Lucy rushed tumultuously in.

"We couldn't help it, Mrs. Pratt. There isn't a person speaking the English language to-day that could have helped it, knowing that package belonged to Mr. Milner." Mrs. Pratt compressed her lips slightly. Her shrewd eyes were plainly satirical. "Oh, I know it," Lucy answered, reading the glance. "You are thinking you didn't open it. But then you thought it was proof. It's not proof."

"What is it, then?"

"It's letters, his own letters written to some one he dearly loved. They were returned to him."

"'Twas that woman," said Mrs. Pratt, in a quick self-betrayal.

Hallett and Lucy exchanged a glance. Then it was known there that summer. Felicia May had bound the giant to her car, and everybody saw.

"We have read one of the letters," Lucy continued.

Mrs. Pratt's eyes were on the package in Hallett's hand.

"So now you want to print 'em," she commented, slowly, in a tone betraying nothing.

"We want them," Lucy went on, swiftly. "We want them—to burn. Nobody has any right to these letters now, have they, Mrs. Pratt?"

The old woman slowly shook her head. A dimness suffused her eyes. Her lips moved. "Poor boy!" she seemed to be saying. Again they had a glimpse into her understanding of what had gone before. It seemed to make that summer, the last one he had had, an intolerable one for him to have borne, for them to remember. Even this woman who served him with the needful things of life must have seen him sometimes

off his guard, pallid, distraught, if the siren flouted him. Perhaps she had watched him in Felicia's train, when that young beauty trailed her splendor across New England, thence to return to India, its suns and mysteries.

"Well," said Mrs. Pratt, "you want to burn 'em now?"

"Now," said Hallett. He was still holding them with a firmness that indicated his intention not to relinquish them save for a purpose he approved. The room was very still. Bees hummed loudly outside the window, and leaves stirring there made their soft sound audible.

"Well," said Mrs. Pratt again, at length. Her voice moved in an eloquent, still way, as if younger motherhood cried in her. "I guess we might as well go down to the fireplace. You fetch 'em, if you feel to."

She led the way, and Hallett, with the letters, followed next. They went through the kitchen, where dinner was beginning, and the pot, waiting for the unworthy potatoes, boiled merrily, and so on into the guarded quiet of the parlor, where the closed blinds gave a green seclusion, and the air between their slats stirred dried grasses and the peacock feathers over the glass. Mrs. Pratt led them to the hearth.

"I had the stove took out in the early fall when he was here," she said. "He was terrible set against airtights. There! here's the fireplace just as 'twas."

Hallett gave the package over to Lucy, and then walked away to regard the portrait of General Grant. Lucy turned to Mrs. Pratt.

"Don't you think you'd better do it?" she asked.

"No, dear," said Mrs. Pratt. "You see to it, just as you feel to, same as if I wasn't here."

Lucy unfolded the first letter and laid it fluttering on the andirons. She lighted it, and one after another drew forth the rest and burned them at the flame. Hallett still had his back turned, and Mrs. Pratt gazed at the mantel, evidently at the picture of a stern-looking man with long hair and a dickey. Once she lifted it from the shelf and ran her apron hem along the top of the case, to remove an imagined grain of dust.

"There!" said Lucy, at length. "There!" She wanted to add, "There is Cecil Milner's heart," but the event had passed too quietly to admit of fervid comment.

"There!" said Mrs. Pratt, in echo. "Now I'll see about dinner. You go where you're a mind to, out in the garden, or set right here. I'll call you when it's ready."

After she had gone, Hallett turned abruptly and came back to the fireplace, where Lucy stood as if distraught over a sacrifice that had cost. He put his arm about her, and she turned to him.

"We've burned up what the world can't duplicate," he said, passionately. She nodded. "Rossetti, Keats —there they are, blossoming, flaming to eternity. His letters—"

She drew herself away and faced him.

"Wasn't it right?"

"Yes, it was right; but it's bitter, bitter."

"You're not sorry?"

"Oh, I can't be sorry. Somehow they were ours, his and ours. They've passed on something to us. He could only dream it. We'll live it for him, dearest—dearest!"

THE MASTER

STILLMAN, senior editor of that magazine which might have been called *The Pride of America*, was walking rapidly away from his office through the November sleet. He was a tall, thin-cheeked man with deep-set eyes, and stiff hair standing straight up from his forehead; and this latter was so expressive a part of his outline that those who were accustomed to his indoor look were apt to cry out upon any hat he might wear, as an unwelcome disguise. At the corner another man, slightly bent, and the more so to-night because he was holding his coat close and scudding under the blast, almost ran into him and stopped an instant in perfunctory apology. But Stillman knew him and held out his hand.

"Why, it's not you, Brainerd!" he said, warmly against the icy wind. "I didn't know you were in town. Going to the office, were you?"

"I knew I shouldn't find you so late," said the other, "but I was near and thought I'd venture it. On your way home? I'll walk a step with you."

He turned, and they went on together, Stillman with a hand on his friend's arm now in affectionate solicitude. Brainerd meant a great deal to him, not only as the writer of the new serial the magazine had in its safe, but as primary agent in the best part of the literary life signalizing the last quarter-century. Younger men

might not prize that life to the exclusion of the active present, Stillman sometimes thought; but though he was editor of a magazine that had got to keep itself up to date, if it meant to live, he was almost sure he did. It was too dark in these down-town byways to show him exactly what manner of look Brainerd was wearing to-night; but he knew, from old contemplation of it in their confabs running through the years when they had found each in the other the nearest approach to some of the answers life had to give. There was the great forehead, the statesman face with its sensitive mouth and burning eyes, the signs of indomitable will that had, so Stillman believed, wrecked his friend so far as all the chances of a paltry success were concerned, but wrecked him to cast him on what headland of austere achievement only the immortals knew. Brainerd was speaking, still holding his coat tight with one hand and ready to chase his soft hat with the other.

"About your letter, Stillman; I had to come. I really had to. It's wormwood to me to refuse anything you ask, but that I simply couldn't do. Why, that's the crux of the story, the nub of the whole thing. Don't ask me to leave it out. I can't. I won't."

Stillman burst into a delighted laugh. It sounded as if he were glad to be denied.

"Bless you, old man!" he said. "I didn't ask you to leave it out, not *in propria persona*. It was three of the young cockerels in the office. They guided my pen. I told 'em you wouldn't do it, but I was perfectly willing to let them have a try. Don't you worry your head about that. The thing's going in as you wrote it, never fear!"

He had paused before the door of a dingy building, competing in no way with the city's brilliance except in a modest candleshine from its windows.

"See here, Brainerd," he continued, in some hesitation, as if he asked a dubitable thing, "come along in. It's a dinner of the Tribunal, the club I told you about where we pitch into art and letters, and slang one another to beat the band. Come in."

Brainerd shook his head and tried to clutch his collar tighter.

"No," he said, "oh no! I'm not the man for dinners. I've nothing in particular to say, unless I've got my pen in hand, and I'm an awful damper on the flow of others. I get thinking about things—other things a mile away. That palsies the mirth."

"But they'd feel flattered," Stillman urged weakly, as one who would fain believe in the argument he himself advanced. "They're mostly young men, and it's an honor to have you sit down with them. They ought to have the sense to know it."

"Ought to!" Brainerd jeered, yet with a perfect candor. "Well, so they ought, if it's a question of years, like reverencing your Chinese grandmother because she's weather-worn. But for anything else! No, no, Stillman, no! you're well aware they don't think anything about me except as an old duffer that's elected to write in a lingo they can't abide. That's some of them. They're the ones that have helped compile a neat little biographical sketch of me tucked away in the editorial pigeonhole somewhere. The rest are the humorists. They wake up once in a while in the silly season or when the mother-in-law joke palls,

to give an imitation of me, more or less clever. But tolerate me at dinner! They wouldn't, they couldn't. Good night, old chap. I'm staying at the Pennsylvania over there. To-morrow I'll drop in to see you."

Stillman put out his hand.

"Anything on to-night?" he asked. "You wouldn't let me come round after the dinner? We break up early. Some of the fellows have a night shift, and I can get away with the first."

"Let you! guess I would. My grate is heaped and there's a modest coal-hod hard by. We'll have a pipe."

So they parted; and Stillman, pausing at the shabby door before he rang the bell, watched his friend away through the storm and wondered, as he did at every sight of Brainerd and every syllable from him, over the fatuity of things here below. Have men, he mused, so veiled their eyes that the vision has to be hung before them in every possible light before they bow to it? He had hoped to see in his own time the sufficient recognition of Brainerd, but the years were going fast and little pewter gods were being set up on every shelf. This meant a great deal to Stillman. He was, in a way, a controller of destinies. Many a writer of potential power had he heartened and welcomed gladly to the august portals of his magazine, and to many a man of mark, undeservedly exploited, had he refused admittance. Yet on Brainerd's standing he had been able to cast no illuminating glow. He could crown him, but he had to go out and pluck the laurels for it himself. The stubborn public refused to help him. Out of his discouragement he heaved a sigh and went

pondering into the low-studded room with its long table, where the talk was just beginning.

When they sat down there were an even twenty of them. The laurel wreath, silent reminder of the meed the world accords, stern, reproachful token no one of them might inherit, lay on the table, its only decoration; thus it was always, the one ceremonial it involved being its burning, in a circle of silence, at the close.

This dinner, though its date was that of a regular meeting, was understood to be especially in honor of Jerry Burton, on the eve of sailing for "abroad". Jerry had, unaffectedly to his own surprise, made a modest pile of money out of a novel his colleagues regarded slightingly, and he, on his part, scored as no good at all; and he now, he as frankly stated, having propitiated the lesser gods and got what he could out of them, meant to take their largess, and live as long as possible in the classic seclusion of Cambridge or Oxford, write essays and sacrifice to the high gods only. He was a little fellow with a weazened face drawn to the point of an ineffectual chin, and sitting beside big Flynn, the dramatic critic of the *Scatterbrain*, he looked even more inconsiderable, and so Flynn told him, though in terms less crudely fitted to the basis of their relative deserts.

"What kind of an emissary are you, anyway, to send over to the United Kingdom?" said he, after the fashion he found suited to his acquiescent chum, "you that have faked up a bally book out of nothing?"

"Not out of nothing," said Jerry, peering through his wine as if it were a crystal ball and he meant to see the future of more ten-strikes in it. "Out of reminiscences of other books I didn't fake."

"Right you are. And you're on Easy Street, and look at me! I've done my three columns a day reg'lar for the last eight years, and there's no Oxford in mine."

"There *is* something reminiscent in your book, Jerry, and that's a fact," said Glendon Springs, a freckle-faced young fellow farther down the table. He drew his pale brows together over his pale eyes and scrutinized the statement, having made it. "It's a bad book, infernally bad. You know I said so in my review, so I've a right to say it here. It's bad as they make 'em, but it's reminiscent of something good."

"Oh, I don't know," said Jerry, with a genuine carelessness. The book had never markedly interested him, except as matter for wonder that so much money had been snatched out of it. "Don't ask me."

Stillman looked quickly up at the moment. Something they did not say, and certainly had not even recognized themselves, seemed to suggest to him implications of vital importance.

"You know we've been negotiating with Brainerd for a serial," he mentioned to the man next him, but in a tone to be heard accurately over the small area of talk. "I've been looking it through."

"Same old sixpence?" called a little man, like a beetle, marked off by stiff black hairs and hard black eyes. "Fog so thick you can't see your hand before you? Style twisted into double bow-knots, till you think you're untying macramé lace?"

"What in the blazes is macramé lace?" inquired a rosy, globular man who was eating his dinner almost worshipfully if he chanced on a toothsome morsel, and profanely when his expectations were balked. He

wrote poetry of a most delicate and crystalline type—like hoar frost and snow wreaths, said his following. That question was allowed to pale into obscurity, for the editor was continuing in the path his reflections had evidently decreed.

"I'm not so sure it's obscure. I'm not sure but it's devilish clear, if only you've the time to unravel it."

"Trouble is with our day and generation, we haven't time," snapped out a little red-haired man, all spectacles and trembling upper lip. He got his living by dramatic notes, and was in a perpetual state of truculent honesty, defending his point of view with a passionate haste even before it had been assaulted. He was perennially angry and fitted out for the fray by a stiff taste in adjectives. "We haven't time for anything but skimming surfaces. It's damnable, positively damnable. It's stultifying and corrupting, and the punishment for it is that we're condemned to live in the pit of our own fatuity."

Harrison Brisbane, a slow, grave man, who did hackwork on half a dozen dailies, had been looking down at his untouched plate with an air of detachment both from the food and the circle it gave pretext for. He never ate much at these meetings. He never talked much. But when he did speak, the men, even the ones outside easy earshot, listened.

"Speaking of failures—" but nobody had been speaking of them. Only each individual had been conscious, down in the midst of bitter acquiescences and old sick desires, that if failure was to be cited, the finger of life would point to him, saying inexorably,

"Thou art the man." "Speaking of failures, should you say Brainerd was a failure?"

The question seemed to hang there in air for them to scrutinize, perhaps to pelt with answers. But for a good many minutes nobody took a shot at it. Everybody got thoughtful, but all the faces looked the same complexion. Brainerd most evidently was a failure.

"Haven't you a word to say for him, any of you?" Stillman inquired pleasantly, with a little smile on his lips. "Am I the only one to take a hand? If I do, you'll say it's because I've got his serial."

Jerry, with one of his hasty turns of speech, as if he were jumping into a ring, broke in on the heels of this.

"Trial!" he called. "Trial! John Brainerd to be tried by a jury of his peers!"

"It's an off night. We weren't to try anybody to-night," the globular man objected. He was lifting some bits of mushroom on his fork, and looking as if, before they were irrevocably eaten, he might like to photograph them and so preserve their sacred memory.

"No," said the little man like a beetle, in his quick, hard voice, "but we can do it informally. Let it be informally. Go on, Brisbane. Bring your accusation."

The slow, grave man seemed to wait for a moment upon his own words, in the sincere determination that they should be of proper weight.

"I was thinking of Brainerd to-day," he said. "I had occasion to review his life briefly for a biographical sketch, the facts of it, and I found myself afterward coloring up the facts so I could see what they meant—just as you might put a dye in clear water to define the shape of the bottle—to see what they meant to the

man himself. These are the facts, as I get them. Brainerd began by writing faithful, likable stuff better than any of its day in America. He promised to be one of the immortals—our little two-for-a-cent immortals, best we make. Well, all of a sudden he changed. I don't know whether he got big head or whether he grew up and overtopped us so we can't look up to him without a stiff neck. I don't know what happened to him. But the stuff changed. In the beginning, as they say about the last new machine, any child could run it. Any creature capable of reading English could take up Brainerd's books and understand 'em. Now—"

"Why, now," said the little man like a beetle—"now he's not only obscure, he's a maze, a labyrinth. He that runs can't read it. If it's an honest runner, he makes faces at it, it gets him so mad."

"I wonder what they think about it, the ones that don't run," said the editor, slowly, out of the painstaking consideration he gave every detail of the pageant passing before him, "the old maids in country towns that get a book out of the library, and, if they haven't read it in two weeks, only say they 'haven't quite finished it,' and keep on at their job of half a page a day? I wonder what a ranchman would think out there on the plains—"

"Have to be a college graduate," snapped the red-haired, spectacled fellow.

"Well, let him be a college graduate. Plenty of university among the cattlemen. I wonder what anybody with time and silence about him like a wide horizon—why, boys, we haven't any time, we haven't any silence. We're hung in a cage like the kind old

Balue invented for Louis XI., and every time Wall Street or a spectacular murder case or a new theatre or any other blasted madness of events comes by us, it gives us a twirl. But what would any clear-minded fellow with brains under his scalp say to John Brainerd's stuff if he sat down to it in the stillness—the kind of stillness where you can hear pine-needles dropping round you, or withered leaves?"

There was stillness of that sort at the table for an instant. Every man's mind returned to some moment of its own, when the quiet of life had made itself felt benignly. The little man like a beetle spoke first, in a testy fashion, because the challenge had savored too much of sentiment.

"Well, what's the matter with being clear, anyway? What's the advantage or the special chrism of advertising you're too obscure for the masses—grammar school masses? They're a good fair average. Let the grammar school throw a vote now and then. If I find a spring of water in the wilderness, I don't want to stop and analyze it, do I? No, by George! I want to drink."

"I think, you know, he did a fine thing," said a young fellow with thin light-brown hair and a delicate cheek like a girl's. He wrote such drastic comment and criticism that men had often threatened, in good set terms, to lick him, and then, meeting him, had burst into hoots of laughter at his inconsiderable equipment. "I think Brainerd did a mighty fine thing when he slipped out of the race and retired to that gloomy old place of his down in the country."

"Gloomy!" cried the red-haired man. "I guess

you'd be gloomy, and so would your hall bedroom, if you made as little as Brainerd makes in the course of a year. Why, his sales are almost invisible to the naked eye. His half-yearly statement must be a 'perfect and absolute blank'."

"Yet here's Stillman got him for another serial. Stillman pays—don't you, old boy?"

"Yes," said Stillman, seriously, "we pay, but we can't do it often for Brainerd. The circulation wouldn't warrant it."

"Then what in the name of Jupiter and all his satellites do you have him at all for?" squeaked the red-haired little man.

Stillman smiled and said nothing.

"Now don't you put on that inscrutable look," the little man bade him. "That 'I could-an'-if-I-would' sort of a phiz! If you know anything to the advantage of Brainerd, tell it, right here and now. He needs it bad enough."

"Bless you," said the globular man, "we know what Stillman has him for. He has him to keep up the tone of the magazine. He's trying to cater to the octogenarians who remember there were giants in New England in those days, and the giants wrote for the magazine he's inherited. He knows the magazine's no such matter now, but he wants to give the octogenarians a solemn feast day once in a while, and hypnotize 'em into thinking the wind's in the same quarter."

But Stillman, though he vouchsafed another smile to indicate he took no offence, still said nothing.

"I've been down there to that dismal hole Brainerd's retired to," said the beetle. "It was an early spring

day, and there were puddles in the road and ducks drabbling in 'em and a general smell of mud and nastiness. And there was Brainerd in his big bare library—I don't know whether there was another furnished room in the house, but he had a stack of books—there he was, doing proof and lining and interlining, and making a job the compositor must have cursed him for. I bet it looked like half a dozen temperature charts woven into one when he got through with it."

"You know," said the red-haired man, incisively, as if he bit off the words, "I think myself that was rather splendid of Brainerd, going off down there. He's the only man of us all that's had the nerve to give up the whole bloomin' show of things and retire to a corner to do the work he means to do."

"He's consecrated to it," said Stillman, quietly, "Brainerd is."

But because it was so big a word they stared at him a moment, and said nothing, even to challenge it.

"Now," said Brisbane, in his manner of weighing what he had to offer, "I've wondered a good deal if the peculiar thing about Brainerd isn't that he's obscure. It's that he's clear. But we're so infernally dull we don't catch on. Don't you know the wireless fellows and their instrument—I don't understand really the smallest thing about it, so if I get it all wrong, don't blame me—they say the thing is tuned to a certain note—G, it may be, or A. And if they don't get a response, they change their tune. Now, we don't get Brainerd really, any of us, but it's because he isn't

tuned to our pitch, and he's so—so inevitable, he won't change his tune."

"Well, then, he may as well be writing his runic rhymes on a piece of brick and tucking them into the sand," said the red-haired man, "for all the good they do."

"Yes, that's pretty much it: for if they're tucked into the sand, Man Friday's foot'll stumble over 'em some day, and they'll be fished out and Crusoe'll read 'em."

"Well, I like that," said Jerry. "You assume Crusoe's going to be so much cleverer than we are, do you?"

"Oh, by all odds," said Brisbane. "I think he's going to be clever enough to understand how particularly important it is to sit still and translate the little pen scratches Brainerd's been making all these years, down in his dim old nest."

"Oh, Brainerd isn't great," said the black beetle, decisively. "That's the thing you'd say about a chap that was great, posterity and all that. No he isn't great."

"I'm not prepared to say he is," Brisbane retorted. "Only, you ask Stillman. I'll abide by what he tells you."

But Stillman would not speak. He only smiled again his smile of a tolerant obscurity and then vouchsafed the same excuse:

"Oh, I can't exploit Brainerd. You'd think I was pushing the serial. Some of you fellows that write notices would say I was working you. Besides, I like him too well."

Glendon Springs took a leap here from Brainerd, the unsung, to Jerry Burton, sitting with "all his blushing honors thick upon him".

"I know who it is your book's reminiscent of, Burton," he called, in the shrill delight of discovery, so loudly that all of them turned that way. "What a fool I was not to spot it earlier! Wish I'd said it in my column. Why, it's Brainerd."

"The deuce it is!" said Jerry, placidly eating his roast. "How do you make that out?"

"Why, it's his very fist put to another purpose than he uses it for. It's Brainerd cheapened, to sell."

"Yes," said the globular man, dreamily regarding a crackly bit of fat and then deciding what cubic measure of bread would fit it. "I see that. It's the use of the adjective, it's that trick of tacking your preposition on to the end instead of minding the grammarians. It's the cadence of the sentence, too. You're a nice little boy, Glendon, a nice clever little boy to think that out."

Jerry was undisturbed.

"Well," he said, with philosophy, "don't lay it up against me. If I did, I didn't know it."

"Why, of course you don't know it," the red-haired man declaimed, piercingly. "We don't any of us know it; but we have to sit up nights to keep from falling into Brainerd's pesky style. If you've once read him it clings to you; if you keep on reading him you get saturated and you're lost."

"We find that in the office," said Stillman, unobtrusively. "I couldn't tell you the number of stories that are flung aside every week without further considera-

tion because they're flagrant imitations of Brainerd. And yet, not imitations. It's unconscious, all of it, I'm willing to swear."

"Oh, I don't know what's imitation and what isn't," said the beetle man, gloomily. "Or rather, I know, but it wouldn't be popular to tell. Look at that fellow Out West that took a prize from the *Flittermouse*. That story was Brainerd, nothing but Brainerd, in the form of it. I'm not prepared to say the fellow didn't know what he was doing. I think he did."

"Little Jerry, didn't know, though," said Burton, with an unmoved front. "He wrote his little book just as nice and careful out of his own head; and the public, they bought it and bought it and bought it, and paid down their good money, and look at little Jerry to-day! Here he sits, the cynosure of every eye, and his steamer ticket's at home pinned on to a cushion embroidered for him by an unknown girl that said she liked his book."

But nobody could laugh. They were all thinking too hard. Only Stillman looked a little breathless, like one running a race and seeing the goal before him.

"But why," said Brisbane, slowly, in his manner of always asking why and cogitating profoundly on the conclusion he meant to make when the data were all in, "if Brainerd's so unpopular—if he can't make his pile like Jerry here, if he can't rake in *kudos*, if the judicious grieve and the ribald laugh—why are they all imitating him?"

"Because they don't know they are imitating him," said Glendon Springs, eagerly, as if he had made the best of discoveries. "They've caught it."

"You don't know you've got typhoid till the germ develops and the doctor tells you so," said the red-haired man.

"Oh, no, they don't know it."

"Well, why are they praised? Why do they make money?" Stillman offered slowly, as if the answer were of the greatest importance and he was trying their pulse and noting every beat, "when he's so far from any sort of worldly stunt?"

"Because they've translated it into the language the market understands," said Glendon Springs. He answered quietly, but his eyes shone. "He's dug out the gold. They've minted it. They've put it into circulation."

"I shouldn't say his was the virgin gold, the ingot," said Brisbane. "I should say Brainerd had put it into a statue—into a whole gallery of statues—and nobody's rich enough to buy such statuary. Nobody's got the eye to want it, maybe, or the great gallery to put it in."

"If we're going to talk in figures," said Jerry, "I'll have a hack at it and say, if his statues are gold, the rest of us have made ours out of base metal. But they sell. Don't forget my steamer ticket pinned to that cushion. They sell."

"There seems to be the biggest sort of injustice in that," said Brisbane. "Is Brainerd going to die the death of the failure while little folks like our Jerry here go down to posterity?"

"Oh, posterity!" the red-haired man flung in, "posterity! that's another pair of sleeves. If you talk about posterity—"

"When you go into a picture-gallery Over There,"

said Stillman, indicating the continent of Europe with a generous sweep of his thumb, "how much time do you spend on the pictures labelled 'School of Raphael,' 'School of Perugino'?"

"Yes," said Jerry, sunnily, "tell us, you fellows, that have made the grand tour. I want to know, so I can remember what to do myself."

"Don't you," said Stillman, with an unmoved gravity, "turn to Raphael and Perugino themselves?"

The red-haired man was leaning over the table and scowling at Stillman, but, it seemed, in pure curiosity and the effort of thought.

"Well, then," said he, in a burst of appeal, "will you tell me why in thunder Brainerd takes such a lot of reading to get at what he's going to say?"

Stillman seemed to feel that this was the moment for a direct statement he had never made before.

"Because he's got more to say than anybody else."

"What's he wrap it round for in so many coils? What's he weave it so fine for, too fine for the naked eye?"

"Count the threads in the widest tapestry ever made,' said Stillman, "the tapestry crowded with the biggest figures. You'll find they're multitudinous. Then pick up the old cushion at home, the one on the rocking-chair in great-aunt's parlor. Got a watch-dog on it, or maybe a stag's head. Count your threads there. Any child could do it."

Every man looked at his plate or studied the face of his opposite neighbor, absorbed like his own. The red-haired man broke the stillness.

"Well," said he, "I gather that the sense of the

meeting points to the idea that Brainerd's misunderstood, not appreciated."

"Oh, no," said Stillman, "not that. Only referred—he wouldn't appeal himself, but some of us can appeal for him—to the higher tribunal."

"What's that, Stillman?" Brisbane asked.

"The future." After a moment, Stillman went on. A light had broken out upon his face, and he talked eagerly as one who had something of incredible value to share with them. "Why, don't you see what you've said here to-night? You've owned Brainerd works a spell you can't escape. You scoff at his style, but you tear off samples from it and go and have waistcoats made of it as much like it as you can manage. Why, boys, he's our master."

It was by one impulse, it seemed, that they were on their feet. Jerry, perhaps, it was who led—Jerry, whose dinner this had been, and who had seen it converted into a ceremonial before an actual shrine. He at any rate proposed the toast: "The Master."

They drank it in silence. No such meeting of the Tribunal had seen them so moved, all of them in precisely the same way. Something in the talk, the recurrence to ineffable ideals, the martyrdom of obscurity decreed to genius in its lifetime, appealed to that old self each man had believed in, at one stage, as his own indubitable possession, seeing it pierce the darkness of contemporary dulness like a star. For a moment it seemed possible to attain, not the world's suffrages, but a foothold on that steep where climbing is its own present reward. Chairs were pushed back then, and the meeting was understood to be over. No

man felt like dropping into the familiarity of an informal conclave as it had been on other nights. But Stillman's voice recalled them.

"Brainerd is here in town. Shall I tell him we—well, I'll tell him we drank to him, at least."

His eyes sought Brisbane's with perhaps a suggestion in them, almost a prayer, and Brisbane leaned over and lifted the laurel wreath in both his hands.

"Take him"—he halted for the confirmation he did not need, and challenged the other acquiescent faces—"take him this."

THE INTERPRETER

THE city was gasping under a moist, intolerable heat. The general mind was given over to temperature and that overworked term humidity, dwelling at last, with enfeebled but inborn necessity, on a consideration of dear life, that now seemed held in the balance, to be clung to blindly until the springing of a breeze.

Nina Castro languished on a wicker couch, with cool drinks at hand, and a maid to fan her and divine new wants. The couch had been demanded when the temperature ran up, and was as hastily produced by a hotel management bound to propitiate a star so cognizant of her rights. Half the blind had been left cleverly open, so that a sun-shaft, obliquely thrown, accented her yellow hair and brightened her white dress. The maid tiptoed about with a solemn and ostentatious zeal, and the secretary, a hardheaded young person, who knew Nina through and through, and had no opinion of her, half in satirical policy preserved the same expectant attitude at the desk where she awaited orders. The maid and the secretary and the actress were all acting, each in her degree. There was a knock at the door, and the maid fled to meet it in a horrified haste, testifying to the profanity of invading lightly a shrine like this. She came back bearing a card, and the actress took it in a languid hand. But instantly a

thrill ran through her. She rose, with a charming sweep of draperies, and spoke in the voice trained so untiringly to the curves of beauty that now its artifice simulated all the freedom of nature:

"Send him up. Miss Melcher, you may go."

Miss Melcher bestirred herself with a careful courtesy, and placed her pen and paper in order on the desk. After that was done, she paused a moment before leaving, and considered Nina's beautiful back, as the actress stood, in a trance of some emotion or its counterfeit, still musing over the card. Miss Melcher's look was an illuminating commentary on the woman she had served for many years—contempt for the beautiful back and envy of it, a bitter worship of charms not her own and the clear-sighted scorn, instinct with sex itself, of cheap goods not yet marked down by Time. Then, as Nina turned, with a little frown and a recalled attention, Miss Melcher gave the desk another hasty touch and slipped out of the room. The man was entering. Miss Melcher threw him a comprehensive, half satirical look in passing, as if to say: "You're here again. You haven't changed. No more has she."

He recognized her as an unconsidered personality he had been used to before his three months' absence in Europe, and held out his hand. But the girl apparently failed to see it, and immediately he was in the room, before the dangerous reefs of Nina's beauty and her unsparingly administered charm. His eyes rested upon her in a half unwilling pleasure, as hers sought him sweetly with no withdrawal in them. She extended both her hands, and he took them. She brightened more and more. To her mind, he had not

changed. He was still handsome, incalculably virile—and hers. How worn he had been growing in the last years, how dulled his eyes were now from some flagging of the spirit, she did not see.

"Tired?" she asked him fondly, leading him to a chair, and he remembered, with his old amused commentary on her, that this was the full-throated voice she had built up from crude beginnings and used now too indiscriminately.

"No," he said, "we had a smooth passage. Not a ripple. I slept most of the time. How are you?"

He threw into his tone the caressing anxiety she challenged and, in one form or another, always received. She had sunk again on the couch, and crossed her feet with an unerring grace. Her face became a page of sweet contradictions where the brows frowned while the mouth was smiling. She answered gently, with a childlike pettishness calculated to augment the charm.

'I am worn to the bone, dear, simply worn to the bone. The new play won't go."

"Seems to me I've heard that before, or something like it!"

She shook her head.

"No," she denied, "nothing so bad as this. It's a flat failure. I haven't even rehearsed it."

"It's Mary Gale's, isn't it?"

"Yes. I had great faith in her. But she can't do it. She's no good."

"Told her so?"

"Yes. I told her yesterday."

"How did she take it?"

"Take it? Why, I don't know. How should she take it?"

He looked at her for a moment, still smiling in a way destined always to arouse in her a vague discomfort. It suggested pastures where she never fed.

"You know," he explained, "I used to see Mary Gale when I was a boy. We went to school together."

"Yes, you said so. But let's not talk of her. I've lost time over it, and I'm disappointed. That's all there is about it."

"Have you a copy of it?"

She laughed.

"Forty thousand in that desk. We've gone over it until—stale! Well, I should think so. The lines don't mean any more to me now than so much Esperanto. I ought to have Melcher pack these up and send them to her. I don't want them."

He rose and went over to the desk.

"I'll take them," he said. "I'll see that she has them."

"You can't do one blessed thing with it," she warned him. "It's awfully sweet of you—but the thing's no good. I might have seen it sooner, and saved my pains."

He was quietly pulling out neat acts of typewritten manuscript, and arranging them in a pile on the desk. Then he placed his gloves upon it, as if to fix his claim.

"I suppose you told her your part didn't suit you?" he said incidentally, returning to his seat.

"Yes, that was it. It didn't suit me. Not a bit."

"You told her she had great emotional power, but she must learn construction."

"Yes."

"Then you said play-writing and book-writing were two entirely different matters. In the play, there must be no mystery for the audience. In a book the mystery must be preserved. In a play, every line must count. In a book, you may digress, explain. Didn't you tell her that?"

"Why, yes! but what's the use now, when I've found she can't do it?"

"You told her to observe the effects you got in 'The Lost Fiddler', and asked her if she couldn't learn something from that. Now didn't you?"

"How do you know?" she asked, again wrinkling her brows delightfully.

"Bless you, child, it's what you said to me, seven years ago, when I went to you with my first play. It's what you all say. You learn it from one another. It's your form of polite farewell. Half the time you don't know what you mean by it. You never happen to think, any of you, that the poor devils of authors may know all those platitudes, pat as print. They can't do the trick, but aphorisms won't make them any for'arder. What's the use of saying to a man with no legs, 'My dear fellow, in walking one uses legs.' He knows that as well as you do. That's where the shoe pinches."

"I don't believe I said those things to you," she objected, with that fascinating good-nature which is one step toward supremacy, when the way is lost. "I recognized you from the first."

"You did!" He lost his tired look and roared with ironic laughter. "I should rather say you did. You

kept me hanging round for other purposes; but recognized my—" Then he sobered. "My dear child," he said, "it was all a lucky fluke. You didn't recognize me. Somehow I clambered on, and when the house got a laugh out of me, I stayed. But I'll see that Mary Gale has these things. Pardon me." He was looking at his watch.

"No! no! you'll stay to luncheon. Then we'll drive out into the country, and do something this evening."

"I've got—" he hesitated, and ended gravely, "I've got to run down to Doctor Tarbell's."

"What!" The frown meant heavy weather. She sat up, and there were lightnings on her brow. "She doesn't know you are home?" she suggested, in a determined quiet.

"No," he answered, "but I *am* home."

"Have you been writing to her?"

"Yes."

"Once a week?"

"Twice."

She mused a moment, her delicate hands trembling in her lap. Then she rose, and with a little soft rush, sank at his feet and laid the hands upon his. She looked up at him movingly.

"Sidney," she said, in a broken voice, one he knew also from the stage, "why aren't you sensible? Why aren't you firm?"

He was looking down at her in a grave kindliness, as at a child who expects too much, and yet must not be disappointed.

"Perhaps I'm too firm, Nina," he said. "Perhaps that's what you don't like."

"It means either one thing or the other. Either you are fond of her, or you are not. She's half out of her mind. She has been for years. Doesn't that release you from her?"

He stroked her hands tenderly.

"I rather think I must go, Nina," he said.

She bent her head and cried a few silent tears. Suddenly she began laughing through them.

"She ought to know this, too," she interjected.

"Who?"

"Mary Gale. She thinks you're a hero. She gave you the leading part in the play."

"Your play?"

"Yes. I had to keep cutting you out." She rose, with the suppleness of her craft, and went back to her seat, giving herself, when she got there, little reëstablishing touches—patting her hair with a pretty grace, and pressing her handkerchief to her eyes with the art that aids without havoc.

"What do you mean, Nina? What has Mary Gale done?"

"Why, the man in the play was an all-round angel. I told her he'd have to be cut, and she said he made the play. That's all she knew."

"But what about him?"

"Why, he was meant for you. She owned it—said she'd followed your career for years. Said she knew about you from old friends of you both, and they told her about it, about your faithfulness to—your wife." A quick breath came with the word, as if she felt repugnance to it.

Sidney was not looking at her.

"Well," he said at last, "that's odd. And it's doubly odd it should come now."

"Why?"

He turned to her then with the air of making an intemperate confession to which she had a claim.

"You mustn't use it against me, Nina. You mustn't remind me of it when I feel another way. But it's true that I've had moments, especially coming home on the steamer, when I've wondered whether you mightn't be right."

"Yes!" She bent forward now in a restrained eagerness, hands clasped on her knees, her eyes blazing.

He spoke with difficulty, aiming at absolute fairness and at the same time painstakingly translating his habit of thought into hers.

"I found I had to mull over it all the time on the boat. It had made a break, going away. Coming home would be starting over again, so to speak. For the first time I wondered whether I should start in another fashion."

"Yes," she breathed. "Yes, Sidney, yes."

"I've wondered—I wonder, too—" he broke his speech with a little bitter laugh—"I wonder, too, if I'm a cad for saying it—whether you are right and I have taken needless—pains."

"It's only—" she spoke in a full, sweet voice, with that indescribable nobility of mien which was also, he recognized, a part of her outfit, "it's only, Sidney, the effect on you. It drains you. Don't you see it does?" He was not listening, save apparently to his own inner voice. "Your work, too," she breathed. "If you were free, you'd be another man."

Now he got up and looked for his hat in a vague way he had when he was thinking, and Nina also arose. She confronted him, superb and challenging. "Well?" she said.

He recalled himself with a start.

"I'll come in to-morrow," he promised, adding winningly, with the smile that always earned him pardon, "shall I?"

"Not this afternoon?"

"No, dear, not this afternoon."

A flush came to her cheeks. Her eyes grew dark.

"Sidney," she said, "you deserve to be told to come this afternoon or—" unfailing tact forbade her to go on.

He was looking at her seriously.

"Nina," he said, "I don't please you, do I?"

She answered quickly.

"You please me when you—please me!"

He laughed a little, and at that her eyebrows began to go up whimsically. He put out both hands.

"Come, Nina," he entreated, "be friends with me."

At the moment of laying her hands in his, she snatched them back and raised them to his shoulders. There she held them while she talked rapidly into his face.

"She's half insane, Sidney. You know it. She doesn't miss you. She can't. The doctors say so. You've been gone long enough for her to forget all about you. Now you mean to go down there and remind her again. I wouldn't say a word if it did her any good; but it only takes it out of you. You know that. O Sidney, give it up! Give it up, dear—please."

He was bending toward her vivid face, the flush

upon it, the eyes wet with tears, when she laughed, in a bubble of coming triumph.

"Mary Gale said you were a hero. Be a hero, if you want to, but don't be this kind. Rule things. Don't let them rule you."

He raised his head, with an air of hearing a recall.

"Mary Gale!" he echoed. "Well, let's see what Mary Gale's got to say on the subject. I'll read the play."

Her hands slipped from his shoulders, but he took them, with a quick pressure, and let them go again. "I'm sorry I bother you," he said honestly. "Let me come round to-morrow." When he reached the door, she was still looking at him silently, what judgments forming behind the jewels of her eyes he could not guess. But he had been accustomed to ignore the cruder elements in her, and now he nodded, in a frank goodfellowship, and went out.

That night, after his two hours at Dr. Tarbell's, he took dinner in his own room, and then drew a chair to the window, to read Mary Gale's play. A little kind wind had crept in from the east and was cooling the city. It touched his face, and he was grateful to it. He would not think of the afternoon yet, or the choice it had gravely offered him, and, rather to defer debate he opened the first act and began to read. He read carefully, and presently with a flush upon his forehead and the knitted brows of sharp consideration. He finished the act, the play, and then, before the summer light had failed, went back to read it here and there again. At last he put the acts together, got his hat, and ran downstairs. There he called a hansom and

ordered the man to drive him to the address penciled on a corner of the manuscript.

It was a dull street, with dressmaking advertised on windows old in dust. Women, in brazen challenge to the breeze, were sitting upon doorsteps, exchanging summer repartee with coatless men, and down the street a group of ragged children danced happily to a hurdy-gurdy, and passed an adored and lessening bit of ice from hand to hand. A panting maid, summoned by his ring from some ashy depth, bade him "go right up", and when he hesitatingly complied, he found Mary Gale, warned by another bell from below, standing in the attic hall. He knew her at once, the gaunt, clean look, the good gray eyes and general testimony to shyness and New England virtues, the way of wearing her dull clothes as if they were for use, not plumage, and as if no one had ever praised her for them. She was overwhelmed at seeing him. That was plain at once.

"Why!" she said, and then seemed lost in the depth of her own wonder. "Why!"

He had reached the top stair and given her his hand.

"Hello, Mary!" he remarked, in the language of their school days. "Awfully glad to find you."

Flushed with a kind of rapturous recognition, she led him in and established him in a rocking chair under her one dormer window.

"I never expected such a thing," she declared, and then he understood that she really thought him a good deal of a personage. It amused him, but it touched him also.

"It's only queer I haven't looked you up before," he said. "I know your work."

Mary shook her head and laughed.

"Not all of it," she demurred. "You've seen the stories—not my fashion notes, and my current items, and my pearls of thought."

"Is it as bad as that, Mary?" he asked, with a solemnity she loved.

"Worse," she laughed back at him. "I edit the Girls' Letter-Box." Her eyes had fallen on the manuscript in his hand, and he noted the quick change in her. It was pathetically compounded of hope and terror. The play might have been an old misery she had fought so long that she expected it at every turning. "Why," she faltered, "how did you—?"

"How did I come across this? Miss Castro entrusted me with it."

"I never wanted to see it again," she burst forth, eying it as if, having done strange things to hurt her, it might unexpectedly do more.

He laid it down on the little table, and there was silence between them of the sort that preludes candor. He wished she would ask him what he thought of the play. She was hoping he would tell her.

"Want to do it awfully, Mary?" he was asking, in his kindest tone.

"What?"

"Write a play."

"You know I do. Don't we, all of us? I don't know whether it's the money—no, it isn't. It's creating life, and seeing it breathe and walk. Well?" She

looked at him a moment, and ventured breathlessly: "You don't believe I've got it in me!"

He touched the manuscript with a gentle finger.

"It isn't in this, Mary."

Something faded out of her face.

"It's queer, isn't it?" she mused. "I took the biggest story I knew. I knew it, mind you. I didn't imagine it and hang garlands on it. I had watched it growing. The man was a hero, the only hero I've seen. To be sure, I had to make him subservient to her—that foolish woman."

"She isn't foolish, Mary," he reminded her. "She's very charming—after her own kind."

"I dare say. She seemed foolish to me, the more I saw of her. I don't care much for exotics. I like to find a good, wholesome weed even, growing out of a crack and nourishing itself on air, and still growing."

He spoke in a low tone.

"That was the way your hero seemed to you?"

"Just the way. It seemed to me he fed on nothing and still grew tall. Oh, what a funny world it is!" She threw herself back in a little gale of laughter, and her eyes were wet. "I suppose if I told you how my hero looked to me, you'd never recognize him. You'd never think you'd seen him even."

"Maybe not, Mary." He had a hungry desire to urge her on. He was even willing to entrap her. She seemed to be illuminating page after page of his life, with a rapid brush.

"Fancy," she said, "a man that might have been spoiled by praise, and yet worked on, doing the same

sweet, sane things he began by doing—a man that might have had the blare of trumpets announcing him all the time, and scorned them. No, he didn't even scorn them. He never seemed to hear. He was too busy being faithful to the old humble ties of his life. Some candles go out, you know, some we depend on to light us along to bed. He never seemed to flicker even."

The warmth had come into his face, and his eyes were lustrous.

"Nevertheless," he warned her, "that isn't necessarily drama."

"I suppose it isn't. I'd got so used to seeing it march in my own mind, I fancied it would move of itself anywhere. But that woman! She's as thin as an eggshell. I bungled it. She spoiled it. I can't do anything for her. Maybe I couldn't anyway."

"It's a tough job," he said, feeling about for phrases.

Mary's eyes brimmed with laughing tears.

"Now, don't tell me it's a separate art," she said, "and that it's got to be concentrated, and there mustn't be a word too much, and——"

"Have they said all that to you?"

"Law, chile, yes! over and over! There must be an actor's commonplace book, like the key to the arithmetic. Well, never mind. I had one beautiful story, and I've written it and that's the end of it."

"I'm not sure that it's the end of it," said Sidney suddenly, in a sharp assertiveness that made her wonder. "Mary, when have you seen her?"

"Your wife?"

"Yes. You knew her pretty well."

"She was in the class below," said Mary. She looked away from him briefly, and flushed a little, speaking. "I saw her while you were abroad."

He bent keen eyes upon her.

"What made you do that?"

She hesitated.

"I knew you had to be away," she said at last. "I knew you had arranged everything perfectly, but yet it seemed as if somebody ought to look in, in your place, and keep an eye on her."

"So I've had a friend I never thought of! That was mighty good of you."

"No," she said frankly, "it was gratitude. You've meant a lot to me, right along. You've been a sort of beacon. And when you couldn't be on the spot—well, your care of her has been something so wonderful it seems as if we all ought to stand by and help a little."

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and sat there a moment, musing.

"She was glad to see me to-day," he said, irrelevantly.

"Yes," answered Mary.

"She—" Until now he had not spoken voluntarily of his wife to any one except the doctors and nurses who had charge of her. The unaccustomed relief made him assert almost with an eager passion: "She's really different, Mary. They all say so. She was glad to see me. She was quite herself."

"It's beautiful," said Mary.

"There's one thing—" he hesitated. "I believe I'll tell you. Tarbell thinks I might take her away—just she and I—to the sea, perhaps, and find out how it

works. She doesn't know about it. I didn't want her to know until it's decided."

"Until Doctor Tarbell decides?"

"Until I decide."

"Oh!" Then she said tentatively, "I suppose it would be wonderful to her."

"I suppose it would." He spoke in a heavy brooding. "Really, Mary, I did get the idea, as I was talking with her—he had told me before I saw her—that she would be quite wild with happiness. And in a good way, too, a good, wholesome way."

Mary was smiling at him.

"That settles it," she said.

"No," he owned, "it didn't settle it then. Something has settled it since. At first I was afraid. Not of her, of course. She has never been violent. But of the outcome."

She was smiling now, in a skepticism half scorn.

"Oh, no," she said, "you're not afraid. You couldn't be."

He had got upon his feet.

"Yes, I could, Mary," he said lightly. "But I'm not afraid now, at any rate. Yes, I think we'll do it. I'll look out some little place, and we'll go there with that good maid of hers and see what comes of it. Good-by, Mary. You're a dear."

She stood at the stair-head and watched him down. He knew what thoughts were following him.

He walked home by roundabout ways that took him past Nina's hotel. Under her window he halted a moment, listening to the trained sweetness of her voice

crowning the perfection of a song. Other voices rose in commendation and light laughter when the song had ceased. He waited a moment, as if in ceremonious farewell, and then, taking off his hat to the greatening breeze, walked quickly on.

THE HANDS OF THE FAITHFUL

"NO," he said to the florist, "don't do them up. I'll take them as they are."

He walked out into the May sunshine with the pink roses, vaguely feeling that they ought to add something to the richness of the day. It was, in his weak state, that of a man just recovering from illness, as if he craved some stimulant to waken in him a zest for that joy of life which had for the time escaped him. This, he told himself, must be a moment of great happiness. He had met death and been reprieved, he was engaged to Rose Cameron, and he was going to see her for the first time after her return from that unavoidable absence in Europe, an interval covering very accurately the period of his illness. He was glad she had been away. No comfort her presence could have lent him would have compensated for the irritation of knowing she saw him at his worst. At forty-six one needed all the small bravery of life to keep him in countenance. Last, in reviewing his reasons for present jubilation, he was a great author, a European review had lately told him, and before his illness the scene of another novel had flamed before him, the map of a country yet to be explored.

And after rehearsing all his pretexts for throbbing veins and high anticipation, the day still found him cold.

There was one strange feature of this walk, the goal of his desire: step by step went with him the memory of Anne De Lisle, the woman he had loved in youth, and whose death had not, so he had felt for years, left him free to love again. In that early relation there had been, as later knowledge tested it, something pathetically unfulfilled. He had loved her, but he had loved himself more. His own hopes, his prospects, his discouragements—those were what they had both dwelt on, and he sometimes wondered, in the silence left by her loss, if she had missed a comprehension or a tenderness he might have given. They had been absorbed in the book of his life; but there was her book also to read, and of that, until her death, he hardly turned a page. After that blinding moment, it was different. The pages then were sodden with his tears. He adored the memory of her, and out of a passionate ideal constructed a new loyalty. She had made him, this absent woman; she had bent his life. For out of his failure to her he had awakened to a poignant sense of the imperious rights of souls. Even his work stood secondary to that. He valued it, he had great zest in doing it; but always it slipped down a step in the scale compared with human needs and services. This conviction went so far that when his own command of the written word seemed most precious, something within him was sure to rise and blast the brave assurance in favor of the great give and take of actual life. Though a great author, he lacked the comfort of it, the bravado another man, not maimed by failure at the start, might have taken for a cordial. The world, too, was more his admirer than his friend.

It had wearied of his persistent seclusion, his refusal to consider his work more awe-inspiring than that of the man who builds a bridge or digs a garden-bed. He had weighed its platitudes and knew, he thought, how exactly its interest in his intentions shrank beside its vanity in exploiting him. He would have none of it; and so, having for twenty years advertised himself as a recluse, the world had grown tired and had run after rushlights that were at least willing to burn. Through all this he and the woman had seemed to be living alone and together working out a daily task; but when Rose Cameron dawned upon him like a sunrise in her young splendor, he wondered, with a force amounting to conviction, if he had waited only for that. The interval between loving and loving again seemed, by a fertile inspiration, to be not alone an observance due the woman who had gone. It was a part of a consistent faithfulness, and in it partook also the woman who had come. Not only had these cloistered years been given to mourning: they seemed now a germinative pause before new bloom.

To-day, as Anne De Lisle still paced beside him, he pondered a little at the still presence. He had been accustomed to think she came when there were arduous things to bear; but this was joy before him. Yet she had come and he wondered with awe whether some things, begun as this was, had to be eternal. Then he mounted the steps and was directed, with a flattering haste showing he was expected, up the stairs and into the library, where Rose awaited him. She was standing by the window where she must have watched his coming—a slender shape in white, her girl face pro-

vocative of tender interest as when he saw it first. The round contour of her cheek and chin, the shadowing of the soft dark hair, the eyes with their frank challenge veiled by lavish fringes,—he looked at her, and forbore to speak. He had forgotten, questioning his own wasted face in the mirror, these last months, what youth was like. Between them the roses were laid on the table, he had touched her hands and found them cold, and still, as he remembered a moment after, when they sat looking at each other, he had not kissed her. He broke into his little humorous laugh.

"Perhaps it's because you seem too precious," he said.

"What?" she asked.

He leaned forward and laid a hand over hers lying on the table—a living model on the dark wood. "You don't seem to belong to me yet," he added, in a kind of tender apology. "I must get used to it again."

A great blush rose and overwhelmed her, brow and all. The first thrill of life he had known for months surged up responsive, as he felt his power to move her. She spoke with what seemed a careful tenderness to match his own.

"You have been very ill?"

"Forget it," he admonished her, smiling at the phrase. "I mean to."

She raised her brows in a pretty begging for indulgence.

"I couldn't come. You knew that."

"Indeed I did," he answered heartily. "And it was better not. I didn't know I had so much vanity; but I'm afraid I couldn't have stood seeing you—or

having you see me—while I was being oiled up to run again."

"That's not right," she said, gently, adding with an anxious note he liked: "But you *are* running again?"

"Oh yes! Walking, rather." Then he said more gravely, with a wistful tenderness suited to her youth so generously pledged to him: "I'm afraid I shall only walk, now, Rosamond. I'm going to be an old fellow presently. I hadn't thought of it before this knock-down, I give you my word. If I had—I hope I should have raised the courage to keep away from you."

She spoke with passionate reassurance.

"It doesn't alter you. It's you—you we care about—all of us."

He rose and came a step nearer her, holding out his hands.

"Come, Rose," he said, smiling at her with eyes softened at her tone. "Come. I told you I must get used to you."

She had risen also with his movement, and upon the echo of his words came her sudden backward step, the repelling motion of her hands, involuntarily outstretched, and her sudden cry, "No, no!"

In that instant she had changed. Her girlish sweetness had given place to a woman's passion. It was as if he had seen the bud of maidenhood flame suddenly into bloom. But it was a strange new flower, not, his senses told him, for him to gather. He stood there with his hands outstretched, in the involuntary hope of soothing her through patience.

"Come, dear," he said again. "Don't be cruel to me."

"Am I cruel?" she said, in swift self-blame. "Yes, you think so, too. You are right. I am cruel."

He had time, even in that moment of bewilderment, for a little side-track of wonder over the new tones in her voice. He had known her sweet, bewildering, gently mocking, but not thus—a woman with the notes of life at her command, and all life's challenges flashing in her eyes and fixed in the curves of her grief-shadowed mouth. His hands dropped at his side.

"What is it, Rose?" he asked, with the grave gentleness that had brought about their intimacy. "You've got something to tell me."

"No!" she cried—"no!" and then she added slowly, "You force the truth from me."

"No," he assured her; "believe me, no. There's nothing you need tell me."

"Yes," she returned. She had paled, and the darkness of her hair had given her face a tragic outline. "You don't mean to; but there's something in you that demands the truth. I came home meaning not to tell you—to live it out alone."

He felt a sudden sickness, and accepted it with the patience of those who have often entertained the pangs of life.

"Sit down, dear," he said, grasping at some practical ease for both of them. "We can talk better so."

He took his own chair as he spoke, without waiting for her, because the weakness of his state reminded him anew how ill-equipped he was for any shock. She came slowly forward and stood by the mantel, resting her arm upon it and bowing her head upon her hands. Her shoulders trembled.

"Don't," he whispered.

After a moment she raised her head again and turned upon him the dry passion of a face forbidden tears.

"No," she answered, with a determined quiet, "I won't. Do you think I forget how weak you are? I seem to, but I don't."

He made an impatient gesture of the hand.

"Drop that," he commanded, frowning. "We must get at the sense of this. What is the matter?"

Her lips noiselessly formed the answer, "Nothing," and left the word unsaid.

"Don't tell me that," he insisted, with a calculated sternness. "Something happened to you while you were abroad."

She shook her head.

"Don't, child. I shall find you out. What happened?"

"We mustn't talk of these things," she burst forth. "Can't you see how shocking this is—to see you pale and miserable, and to know—not to have self-control enough to keep from troubling you?"

He sat regarding her in deep consideration, his brows drawn together over the problem of her misery. Suddenly his face cleared. A smile illumined it.

"Why, child," he said, "I know. You don't care about me any more. You've found it out, and you're afraid to tell me."

She bent her face to her hands and broke into tears. In that moment of her veiled vision he braced himself against the blow of a surprise that seemed incredible. In spite of all his disadvantages, once she had loved him he had never reflected that she could do any-

thing else. Indeed, it came to him now that until this shock of illness, reminding him that he was mortal, he had never thought of life or any of its possibilities as weakening for years to come. Yet in a moment he saw youth on one side of the world and himself, very much alone, on the other. There was a barrier between.

"Don't cry, child," he counselled, when he could summon voice and felt the victory of finding it would serve. "You mustn't cry."

"No," she choked into her handkerchief, and he cursed his state anew, knowing what pity moved her.

"Now," said he, "let's talk it over. It's a simple matter. You make it terribly complex."

She turned on him her sodden face, quivering in its determination not to break again.

"I can't think of anything worse," she said, "now, when you're ill, to make a scene—"

"If you say anything more or think anything more about my being ill, you will compel me to damn my illness. I've done that quite frequently of late. However, I shall bless it if it causes you to estimate me better, or brings about a fuller understanding between us. I think you rather want to take off the little ring, dear, don't you?"

She looked at the blue stone where it shone dark against her finger. She could not answer.

"Want me to?" he asked. "Just be sure you don't care, dear, won't regret it. Then pull it off and you'll feel better."

Involuntarily she obeyed him, and held it, hesitating, in the hollow of her hand.

"I wish you needn't give it back to me," he said, tentatively. "Can't you wear it on another finger? No, I suppose not. Or keep it in your trinket-box among other things? Can't you, dear?"

"I'll send it to you," she said, almost inaudibly, and laid it on the table between them.

He laughed. "Bless you, child, no! I can't let you play sense to my sensibility. There!" He took the ring and dropped it in his waistcoat pocket, where it seemed to burn him. Then he turned to her, and spoke with a beguiling warmth. "Who is he, Rose? Don't you want to tell me?"

Imperious life had flooded back into her face. "It isn't possible," she said, in a tone where hope struggled unwillingly against beautiful desire.

"What isn't possible?"

"That things should seem so tragic and yet be so—sweet."

The last word was almost a pathetic prayer to him to let them be sweet in spite of all.

"My dear Rose," he said, didactically, "I have a clever friend who tells me there wouldn't be any tragedies if everybody had common sense. I have common sense. I reek with it. You just play my way. Now"—he leaned forward, coaxing her—"who is he?"

Her lips opened, against preconceived resolve. To her, also, the incredible was happening. Here was a dear confidant miraculously made out of anticipated grief.

"I used to know him here," she breathed. "We met at dancing-school when we were children."

"Saxe King!"

"Yes. He is studying in Germany. We saw a lot of each other at the *pension*. I told him about you, I was so proud. He was kind to me—kinder because you were sick and I was worried. Then, one night—" her voice faltered.

"Don't tell me, child," he said, compassionately.

"Yes, I must tell you." Again her cheeks were flaming. "I want you to know what kind of girl I am. He kissed me. He wasn't to blame. He forgot. I forgot, too. Then I knew there was nothing like it—like him. But I was a traitor."

"Dear child!" he said. "Don't spoil it thinking foolish thoughts. Why, it's morning with you! You're Juliet at the casement. Write to him, dear. Tell him the balcony'll be ready by the time he comes. Tell him we've put up the staging to-day, and the vines and things will be set out to-morrow."

He rose, steadying himself, as he did so, by the table. She crossed the space between them swiftly.

"Oh," she cried, "how good you are! How good! how good!" Then a shade of bewilderment mingled with her hope. "Why," she said, "I never thought. You don't mind a bit. Perhaps you didn't care for me. Didn't you care at all?"

He was looking at her gravely, but in her wonder she forgot to note how pale he was. A smile touched his lips and eyes—a smile she had perhaps never seen there.

"Dear," he said, "I care for you very much. But there are a great many things I can't tell you and that you can't see perhaps until you 'come to forty year'. Things are harder then—and they are easier. But you write to him, child, you write to him."

She gave him both hands impetuously, and he raised them together to his lips. Then he got out of the room, knowing that she was standing there quite still, his roses forgotten almost beneath her hand. He went down-stairs and out into the street, and remembering suddenly that she had watched his coming and might also see him go, he straightened his shoulders and walked off buoyantly. Once round a shielding corner, he faltered, rested a moment for breath, and then turned down to the wider thoroughfare where he could take a car. Thereafter all he could remember of the ride was that the car was crowded, and that a woman holding a baby—an angelic-looking child—sat next him, and that he, vaguely irritated and compassionate because the child's legs hung uncomfortably, put his hand down at his side and gathered up the little feet, supporting them. At his own corner he released them gently and got out, and no one saw his service.

It was in his own library that he sat down to think, and realize that he had nothing left for action, only for the reflections that are like broken shards, vivid and keen-edged, but not to be cemented into any whole. At first he could scarcely tell how deep his wound was or whether it bled too much. It must bleed a little, he told himself. He must be hurt. Yet how much he hardly knew, or whether the crimson flow was weakening his heart. That night, with the habit of those whom life has tutored, he was able to sweep his mind clear of harassment and to sleep, and the next morning dawned with the fiat that a new phase of life must enter. Holiday was over; now he must work, and accepting the decree, he sat down at his table for

the first time since his illness and tried to begin his beautiful book. An hour's futile phrasing, and he dropped his pen and tore the page. He knew, he thought, his doom, and desolation fell upon him. The genius, whatever it was, that had brooded over him and moved his pen to action, had left him.

Thereafter for days he took himself to the library with a regularity which lulled his good attendant into the belief that he had assumed the old habit of work, too soon, perhaps, and yet not dangerously, since at night it left him calm. But he was not writing as of old; he was taking an inventory of his life. The long nights were not renewals; they were still, lucent expositions of what he had experienced and felt. He went back to the beginning, to the day of Anne De Lisle, and now, with a quickened sense of his own abortive deeds, he confirmed that older certainty that his relation to her, cut short by death, had been his first significant failure. He even nursed a pang at wondering how much sooner she had died because he had not understood and answered her in the vague stirrings of her virgin life. Then his work: whatever it had been, the human intention in it had not told. It was neither great enough to bear him to the zone of admirations outside criticism, nor, he told himself, did it reach the heart. If it had reached the heart as warm as it had left his own, there would be signs of it: flowers growing along the way, a bird in the thicket, the sound of moving streams. The universe had closed to him. He felt muffled, condemned to dwell forever in one spot of mental aridness, while other younger feet could press through other portals to the dawn.

Then he came to what had seemed speciously the crown of his whole life: Rose Cameron. He stripped the mantle from that dream and flayed it to the bone. At first he had been drawn to her by her dewy worship of what she called his genius, and then some light in her pure eyes had hinted at a worship of himself. Again he saw the dawn. Sleeping germs rose up in him and flowered; it was like youth, multiplied a thousandfold in the rich soil of manhood, and he believed in miracles. The miracle was that one could lose youth and have it, see love go and then recall it in another form, mourn and be gloriously comforted. Now in his pitiless self-scrutiny he saw that, too, for what it was. What she called his genius had overdazzled her. To find it at her feet and not accept it would have been disloyalty to the sum of great things as she saw them. He was a hero, and she longed to gird him with the sword. But at a quicker footfall, a young voice calling, she had broken these slight loyalties and fled. That, too, was failure.

He seemed to be the victim of some great reaction, unguessed in its inexorable poise and swing until to-day. In his youth he had chosen life, as he saw it through the medium of ambition, and real life, in the woman who might have made it for him, had escaped him. Then he had chosen the life of love, and his work, mysteriously his through some divine decree, had also fled away and left him poor.

All through these days of dumbness, when he was not slipping the beads of remembered folly, he was sitting in his muffled stillness listening to the closing of the doors of life, or, as it seemed to him at times, stumbling

about like a child, shut up for reasons, and reaching up to try one door after another, to find them fast. He took an inventory of what was left him. There was very little. The house where the doors had closed in upon him he had furnished himself, and he had a dull sense that he should get no comfort out of it. And outside life was going on, bourgeoning and swelling, and somehow, for no reason he knew, save that these were his waning years, hereafter he was not going to be able to smell or gather. The game was over before he fairly knew it had begun.

There one evening at his table Doctor Gardner found him, and after glancing at the untouched paper and dry pen, said, in what seemed an incidental kindliness, "Maynard, why didn't you send for me?"

Maynard roused himself out of his mental swoon. He performed the usual small hospitable offices to the extent of a pipe and a glass. But Doctor Gardner pushed them away and continued looking at him.

"Why didn't you?" he reiterated.

"I've been very well," said Maynard. At last he was patient with his state, because it no longer moved him. "I'm weak, that's all."

"Put away your writing and come into the air," said the doctor, again in the voice of one who found something fragile before him, a bubble of life, ready to escape him at a touch.

Maynard shook his head.

"I don't seem to want to. Too much trouble," he continued, looking neutrally before him.

"You've had some kind of a setback," said Gardner

at last, in his impersonal voice. "Don't you think you'd better tell me?"

Then Maynard did look up, with a smile, languid enough but warmed by something of his old sunshine.

"Hands off, old man," he said. "You've got a streak of woman in you. That's why your sympathy is so beguiling. But don't you let me tell. I can't stand it."

At that moment the man came in and laid a stack of letters down before him. There were so many that some of them fell almost into his hand, and he drew it away to give them room. He looked at them idly.

"What an extraordinary mail!" he commented.

"Have you seen the papers lately?" asked Gardner, with a quickening in his voice. The color had risen to his face with the potential wisdom of the message he had brought.

"No; I don't read, these days."

"The amount of it is, some busybody has found out about your illness, garnished it up, and sent it to the papers. They're full of it."

"Oh, no," said Maynard, whimsically, "not that, I guess. I'm not so important as all that."

"You'd better read them. Or—look at your mail. Read that."

Maynard put out his hand and with a random choice took up a letter. It was a poor little letter, in a feeble script. There was no signature, but it was a woman's hand, formed in country schools in older days. She had seen the news of his illness in the paper. It had been a shock to her, and she wanted to express, though late, her gratitude for all he had given her. She was

thankful he was better. Yet, when he should die, "they will meet you and praise you," she wrote, "those who have come through much tribulation."

He laid down the letter. There was a blur before his eyes.

"'Those who have come through much tribulation,'" he repeated. "That's a good line, Gardner." Suddenly with a sweep of the hand he pushed the letters over to his friend. "Open them, will you?" he begged, in a fever. "Are there more like that?"

Gardner began with a subdued haste, as if they were medicinal, reading a line here, a name there. They were of all sorts, from the almost forgotten schoolmate, separated from his fellow in the throng, to the critic of a later day, but they were, as if by an amazing intention, in one key. The world was sorry because he had been so near the leaving of it. And like those who, tongue-tied in daily life are yet shaken into outcry by a common danger, these men and women voiced their gratitude, and it might be, Maynard dared to think, their love. This was the fellowship he had created for himself, or that God, through giving him a gift, had created for him. He sat there with a hand shading his eyes, while Gardner, reading, glanced up, from time to time, to see if there had been enough. Maynard spoke at last.

"That'll do. I'll go through the rest to-morrow. They're curiously alike, Gardner."

"Yes, curiously. It seems to be affection. I won't say gratitude, because you don't like that. But it's a thing so foreign to this modern world that it's a miracle. It seems as if these people had been standing apart

from you to give you breathing-room, not crowding, as if to let your arm have play. Doesn't it seem so, Maynard?"

Maynard nodded, his hand before his eyes. The doctor went on slowly, partly as if he sought out the right word to fit his patient, and partly because the moment really seemed to him amazing. "I never saw anything of the kind. It looks as if you had been, not ignored, but hedged about because you were so precious —a seed in a garden-bed, when there's no other seed exactly like it. I never heard of such a thing, in these days of hounding men to death because they have a gift. Usually, you know, it's—well, it's as if nature gave some of you a present and shut it up in your hand, and then the crowd runs after you and tumbles over you and tries to get a sight of it, as hens chase down one that's got a bug too big to swallow. But they've stood back. They've given you air. And now, when they think you've stumbled, they can't be quick enough with the glad hand."

Maynard had risen and walked to the window. He stood there with his back to his friend, and Gardner had a vague reflection of what he must be thinking, though not with the clarified vision that tingled over Maynard's nerves. He knew that Maynard in that instant saw himself, not as a suffering atom, but a citizen of worlds. The man had been sitting at his loom in darkness, and now a wind had risen and turned the fabric to the sun.

Maynard was speaking.

"Did you ever think we get to a place sometimes where we—we can't live unless somebody lives for us?

We haven't breath enough. Somebody's got to pump it in. We haven't blood enough. Somebody's got to open a vein."

"Precisely."

"In the beginning our mothers live for us. We're fed. Then we think we feed ourselves. We get arrogant, and it isn't till we stumble that we know how weak we are, and then we find—God, man! it's fellowship. With their hands they bear us up—"

He stopped, and Gardner, watching him, did not speak. Maynard walked back to the table with a firmer step than he had taken for many days. He stood there, resting a hand on the blank pages at his place.

"I've got to get to work," he said, imperatively.

"You shall."

"You must police me a little, see that I don't go too fast—"

"I will. You've had some knockdown. I don't know what it is, and it isn't necessary I should. But it's bruised you. That's temporary, however. Mind me, and you shall sit here at your desk—"

"When?"

"To-morrow, for ten minutes. The next day, ten. In six months, your old four hours. Now you'll take some drops I have here and go to bed."

Before the sedative got its grip, Maynard, lying, hands crossed and will quiescent, was conscious of thoughts so comforting that they seemed like actual visitants—men and women who wished him well. They gave him a smiling sense that the world was richly peopled. When he had been most bereft, they made it apparent to him that he had been still companioned.

When he had seemed to himself too poor a thing to be cast outside on the refuse-heap of abortive life, they had wrapped him in a mantle woven, they told him, by his own hands, and led him forth with pæans and rejoicing. Mysteriously among them was Anne De Lisle. She had been with him through it all, when his will swung from attainment to the human and back again to his dear task. Some beautiful poise had been kept because her hands had steadied it. That the slender threads of his own life had penetrated the life outside him was because she had helped to make them hold. It had ended by being her most beneficent gift to die that he might live, and she had been glad to offer it.

Then as the soothing drug laid firmer fingers on him, he saw himself as if for the moment he were detached from all his old desires. He seemed to be marching in a procession, the innumerable throng of silent and absorbed artificers. They were on their way to a temple—what temple he did not know; but as he tried to fix it, his drowsy mind insisted upon abstract definition in the words "one far-off divine event", and he accepted it as quite satisfactory to know that and no more. Each one of the workmen carried something, as if it were a gift entrusted to him to bear safely to the temple. At first it seemed to him that only the favored ones had gifts; and then he knew that all created things held something precious, and must guard it, whether it was the mother who must shield her child or the poet who must keep the rhythm of his song, or the beetle that had sheen upon its wings. He did not clearly see how, but it was apparent to him, in the way

of the vision, that there was more than this: for everybody was guarding not only his own gift, but the gift of everybody else. It was a web of service, a harmony of multitudinous notes, and all mysteriously for the temple.

And through the surge of deepening peace was the certainty that in the morning he should begin his beautiful book.

THE WIZARD'S TOUCH

JEROME WILMER sat in the garden, painting in a background, with the carelessness of ease. He seemed to be dabbing little touches at the canvas, as a spontaneous kind of fun not likely to result in anything serious, save, perhaps, the necessity of scrubbing them off afterward, like a too adventurous child. Mary Brinsley, in her lilac print, stood a few paces away, the sun on her hair, and watched him.

"Paris is very becoming to you," she said, at last.

"What do you mean?" asked Wilmer, glancing up, and then beginning to consider her so particularly that she stepped aside, her brows knitted, with an admonishing,—

"Look out! you'll get me into the landscape."

"You're always in the landscape. What do you mean about Paris?"

"You look so—so travelled, so equal to any place, and Paris in particular because it's the finest."

Other people also had said that, in their various ways. He had the distinction set by nature upon a muscular body and a rather small head, well poised. His hair, now turning gray, grew delightfully about the temples, and though it was brushed back in the style of a man who never looks at himself twice when once will do, it had a way of seeming entirely right. His brows were firm, his mouth determined, and the close pointed

beard brought his face to a delicate finish. Even his clothes, of the kind that never look new, had fallen into lines of easy use.

"You needn't guy me," he said, and went on painting. But he flashed his sudden smile at her. "Isn't New England becoming to me, too?"

"Yes, for the summer. It's overpowered. In the winter Aunt Celia calls you 'Jerry Wilmer'. She's quite topping then. But the minute you appear with European labels on your trunks and that air of speaking foreign lingo, she gives out completely. Every time she sees your name in the paper she forgets you went to school at the Academy and built the fires. She calls you 'our boarder' then, for as much as a week and a half."

"Quit it, Mary," said he, smiling at her again.

"Well," said Mary, yet without turning, "I must go and weed a while."

"No," put in Wilmer innocently; "he won't be over yet. He had a big mail. I brought it to him."

Mary blushed, and made as if to go. She was a woman of thirty-five, well poised, and sweet through wholesomeness. Her face had been cut on a regular pattern, and then some natural influence had touched it up beguilingly with contradictions. She swung back, after her one tentative step, and sobered.

"How do you think he is looking?" she asked.

"Prime."

"Not so—"

"Not so morbid as when I was here last summer," he helped her out. "Not by any means. Are you going to marry him, Mary?" The question had only a

civil emphasis, but a warmer tone informed it. Mary grew pink under the morning light, and Jerome went on: "Yes, I have a perfect right to talk about it. I don't travel three thousand miles every summer to ask you to marry me without earning some claim to frankness. I mentioned that to Marshby himself. We met at the station, you remember, the day I came. We walked down together. He spoke about my sketching, and I told him I had come on my annual pilgrimage, to ask Mary Brinsley to marry me."

"Jerome!"

"Yes, I did. This is my tenth pilgrimage. Mary, will you marry me?"

"No," said Mary softly, but as if she liked him very much. "No, Jerome."

Wilmer squeezed a tube on his palette and regarded the color, frowningly. "Might as well, Mary," said he. "You'd have an awfully good time in Paris."

She was perfectly still, watching him, and he went on:

"Now you're thinking if Marshby gets the consulate you'll be across the water anyway, and you could run down to Paris and see the sights. But it wouldn't be the same thing. It's Marshby you like, but you'd have a better time with me."

"It's a foregone conclusion that the consulship will be offered him," said Mary. Her eyes were now on the path leading through the garden and over the wall to the neighboring house where Marshby lived.

"Then you will marry and go with him. Ah, well, that's finished. I needn't come another summer.

When you are in Paris, I can show you the boulevards and cafés."

"It is more than probable he won't accept the consulship."

"Why?" He held his palette arrested in mid-air and stared at her.

"He is doubtful of himself—doubtful whether he is equal to so responsible a place."

"Bah! it's not an embassy."

"No; but he fancies he has not the address, the social gifts—in fact, he shrinks from it." Her face had taken on a soft distress; her eyes appealed to him. She seemed to be confessing, for the other man, something that might well be misunderstood. Jerome, ignoring the flag of her discomfort, went on painting, to give her room for confidence.

"Is it that old plague-spot?" he asked, with a wholesome candor. "Why not talk freely about it? Just what aspect does it bear to him?"

"It is the old remorse. He misunderstood his brother when they two were left alone in the world. He forced the boy out of evil associations when he ought to have led him. You know the rest of it. The boy was desperate. He killed himself."

"When he was drunk. Marshby wasn't responsible."

"No, not directly. But you know that kind of mind. It follows hidden causes. That's why his essays are so good. Anyway, it has crippled him. It came when he was too young, and it marked him for life. He has an inveterate self-distrust."

"Ah, well," said Wilmer, including the summer landscape in a wave of his brush, "give up the consul-

ship. Let him give it up. It isn't as if he hadn't a roof. Settle down in his house there, you two, and let him write his essays, and you—just be happy."

She ignored her own part in the prophecy completely and finally. "It isn't the consulship as the consulship," she responded. "It is the life abroad I want for him. It would give him—well, it would give him what it has given you. His work would show it." She spoke hotly, and at once Jerome saw himself envied for his brilliant cosmopolitan life, the bounty of his success fairly coveted for the other man. It gave him a curious pang. He felt, somehow, impoverished, and drew his breath more meagrely. But the actual thought in his mind grew too big to be suppressed, and he stayed his hand to look at her.

"That's not all," he said.

"All what?"

"That's not the main reason why you want him to go. You think if he really asserted himself, really knocked down the spectre of his old distrust and stamped on it, he would be a different man. If he had once proved himself, as we say of younger chaps, he could go on proving."

"No," she declared, in nervous loyalty. She was like a bird fluttering to save her nest. "No! You are wrong. I ought not to have talked about him at all. I shouldn't to anybody else. Only, you are so kind."

"It's easy to be kind," said Jerome, gently, "when there's nothing else left us."

She stood wilfully swaying a branch of the tendrilled arbor, and, he subtly felt, so dissatisfied with herself

for her temporary disloyalty that she felt alien to them both: Marshby because she had wronged him by admitting another man to this intimate knowledge of him, and the other man for being her accomplice.

"Don't be sorry," he said, softly. "You haven't been naughty."

But she had swung round to some comprehension of what he had a right to feel.

"It makes one very selfish," she said, waveringly, "to want—to want things to come out right."

"I know. Well, can't we make them come out right? He is sure of the consulship?"

"Practically."

"You want to be assured of his taking it."

She did not answer; but her face lighted, as if to a new appeal. Jerome followed her look along the path. Marshby himself was coming. He was no weakling. He swung along easily with the stride of a man accustomed to using his body well. He had not, perhaps, the urban air, and yet there was nothing about him which would not have responded at once to a more exacting civilization. Jerome knew his face,—knew it from their college days together and through these annual visits of his own; but now, as Marshby approached, the artist rated him not so much by the friendly as the professional eye. He saw a man who looked the scholar and the gentleman, keen though not imperious of glance. His visage, mature even for its years, had suffered more from emotion than from deeds or the assaults of fortune. Marshby had lived the life of thought, and, exaggerating action, had failed to fit himself to any form of it. Wilmer glanced

at his hands, too, as they swung with his walk, and then remembered that the professional eye had already noted them and laid their lines away for some suggestive use. As he looked, Marshby stopped in his approach, caught by the singularity of a gnarled tree limb. It awoke in him a cognizance of nature's processes, and his face lighted with the pleasure of it.

"So you won't marry me?" asked Wilmer, softly, in that pause.

"Don't!" said Mary.

"Why not, when you won't tell whether you're engaged to him or not? Why not, anyway? If I were sure you'd be happier with me, I'd snatch you out of his very maw. Yes, I would. Are you sure you like him, Mary?"

The girl did not answer, for Marshby had started again. Jerome got the look in her face, and smiled a little, sadly.

"Yes," he said, "you're sure."

Mary immediately felt unable to encounter them together. She gave Marshby a good-morning, and, to his bewilderment, made some excuse about her weeding, and flitted past him on the path. His eyes followed her, and when they came back to Wilmer the artist nodded brightly.

"I've just asked her," he said.

"Asked her?" Marshby was about to pass him, pulling out his glasses and at the same time peering at the picture with the impatience of his nearsighted look.

"There, don't you do that!" cried Jerome, stopping with his brush in air. "Don't you come round and

stare over my shoulder. It makes me nervous as the devil. Step back there—there by that mullein. So! I've got to face my protagonist. Yes, I've been asking her to marry me."

Marshby stiffened. His head went up, his jaw tightened. He looked the jealous ire of the male.

"What do you want me to stand here for?" he asked, irritably.

"But she refused me," said Wilmer, cheerfully. "Stand still, that's a good fellow. I'm using you."

Marshby had by an effort pulled himself together. He dismissed Mary from his mind, as he wished to drive her from the other man's speech.

"I've been reading the morning paper on your exhibition," he said, bringing out the journal from his pocket. "They can't say enough about you."

"Oh, can't they! Well, the better for me. What are they pleased to discover?"

"They say you see round corners and through deal boards. Listen." He struck open the paper and read: "'A man with a hidden crime upon his soul will do well to elude this greatest of modern magicians. The man with a secret tells it the instant he sits down before Jerome Wilmer. Wilmer does not paint faces, brows, hands. He paints hopes, fears, and longings. If we could, in our turn, get to the heart of his mystery! If we could learn whether he says to himself: "I see hate in that face, hypocrisy, greed. I will paint them. That man is not man, but cur. He shall fawn on my canvas." Or does he paint through a kind of inspired carelessness, and as the line obeys the eye and hand, so does the emotion live in the line?'"

"Oh, gammon!" snapped Wilmer.

"Well, do you?" said Marshby, tossing the paper to the little table where Mary's work-box stood.

"Do I what? Spy and then paint, or paint and find I've spied? Oh, I guess I plug along like any other decent workman. When it comes to that, how do you write your essays?"

"I! Oh!" Marshby's face clouded. "That's another pair of sleeves. Your work is colossal. I'm still on cherry-stones."

"Well," said Wilmer, with slow incisiveness, "you've accomplished one thing I'd sell my name for. You've got Mary Brinsley bound to you so fast that neither lure not lash can stir her. I've tried it—tried Paris even, the crudest bribe there is. No good! She won't have me."

At her name Marshby straightened again and there was fire in his eye. Wilmer, sketching him in, seemed to gain distinct impulse from the pose, and worked the faster.

"Don't move," he ordered. "There, that's right. So, you see, you're the successful chap. I'm the failure. She won't have me." There was such feeling in his tone that Marshby's expression softened comprehendingly. He understood a pain that prompted such a man to rash avowal.

"I don't believe we'd better speak of her," he said, in awkward kindliness.

"I want to," returned Wilmer. "I want to tell you how lucky you are."

Again that shade of introspective bitterness clouded Marshby's face. "Yes," said he, involuntarily. "But how about her? Is *she* lucky?"

"Yes," replied Jerome, steadily. "She's got what she wants. She won't worship you any the less because you don't worship yourself. That's the mad way they have—women. It's an awful challenge. You've got a fight before you, if you don't refuse it."

"God!" groaned Marshby to himself, "it is a fight. I can't refuse it."

Wilmer put his question without mercy. "Do you want to?"

"I want her to be happy," said Marshby, with a simple humility afar from cowardice. "I want her to be safe. I don't see how anybody could be safe—with me."

"Well," pursued Wilmer, recklessly, "would she be safe with me?"

"I think so," said Marshby, keeping an unblemished dignity. "I have thought that for a good many years."

"But not happy?"

"No, not happy. She would— We have been together so long."

"Yes, she'd miss you. She's die of homesickness. Well!" He sat contemplating Marshby with his professional stare; but really his mind was opened for the first time to the full reason for Mary's unchanging love. Marshby stood there so quiet, so oblivious of himself in comparison with unseen things, so much a man from head to foot, that he justified the woman's loyal passion as nothing had before. "Shall you accept the consulate?" Wilmer asked, abruptly.

Brought face to face with fact, Marshby's pose slackened. He drooped perceptibly. "Probably not," he said. "No, decidedly not."

Wilmer swore under his breath, and sat, brows bent, marvelling at the change in him. The man's infirmity of will had blighted him. He was so truly another creature that not even a woman's unreasoning championship could pull him into shape again.

Mary Brinsley came swiftly down the path, trowel in one hand and her basket of weeds in the other. Wilmer wondered if she had been glancing up from some flowery screen and read the story of that altered posture. She looked sharply anxious, like a mother whose child is threatened. Jerome shrewdly knew that Marshby's telltale attitude was no unfamiliar one.

"What have you been saying?" she asked, in laughing challenge, yet with anxiety underneath.

"I'm painting him in," said Wilmer; but as she came toward him he turned the canvas dexterously. "No," said he, "no. I've got my idea from this. To-morrow Marshby's going to sit."

That was all he would say, and Mary put it aside as one of his pleasantries made to fit the hour. But next day he set up a big canvas in the barn that served him as workroom, and summoned Marshby from his books. He came dressed exactly right, in his everyday clothes that had comfortable wrinkles in them, and easily took his pose. For all his concern over the inefficiency of his life, as a life, he was entirely without self-consciousness in his personal habit. Jerome liked that, and began to like him better as he knew him more. A strange illuminative process went on in his mind toward the man as Mary saw him, and more and more he nursed a fretful sympathy with her desire to see Marshby tuned up to some pitch that should make

him livable to himself. It seemed a cruelty of nature that any man should so scorn his own company and yet be forced to keep it through an allotted span. In that sitting Marshby was at first serious and absent-minded. Though his body was obediently there, the spirit seemed to be busy somewhere else.

"Head up!" cried Jerome at last, brutally. "Heavens, man, don't skulk!"

Marshby straightened under the blow. It hit harder, as Jerome meant it should, than any verbal rallying. It sent the man back over his own life to the first stumble in it.

"I want you to look as if you heard drums and fife," Jerome explained, with one of his quick smiles, that always wiped out former injury.

But the flush was not yet out of Marshby's face, and he answered, bitterly, "I might run."

"I don't mind your looking as if you'd like to run and knew you couldn't," said Jerome, dashing in strokes now in a happy certainty.

"Why couldn't I?" asked Marshby, still from that abiding scorn of his own ways.

"Because you can't, that's all. Partly because you get the habit of facing the music. I should like—" Wilmer had an unconsidered way of entertaining his sitters, without much expenditure to himself; he pursued a fantastic habit of talk to keep their blood moving, and did it with the eye of the mind unswervingly on his work. "If I were you, I'd do it. I'd write an essay on the muscular habit of courage. Your coward is born weak-kneed. He shouldn't spill himself all over the p'ace trying to put on the spiritual make-up of a hero.

He must simply strengthen his knees. When they'll take him anywhere he requests, without buckling, he wakes up and finds himself a field-marshal. *Voilà!*"

"It isn't bad," said Marshby, unconsciously straightening. "Go ahead, Jerome. Turn us all into field-marshals."

"Not all," objected Wilmer, seeming to dash his brush at the canvas with the large carelessness that promised his best work. "The jobs wouldn't go round. But I don't feel the worse for it when I see the recruity stepping out, promotion in his eye."

After the sitting, Wilmer went yawning forward, and with a hand on Marshby's shoulder, took him to the door.

"Can't let you look at the thing," he said, as Marshby gave one backward glance. "That's against the code. Till it's done, no eye touches it but mine and the light of heaven."

Marshby had no curiosity. He smiled, and thereafter left the picture alone, even to the extent of interested speculation. Mary had scrupulously absented herself from that first sitting; but after it was over and Marshby had gone home, Wilmer found her in the garden, under an apple-tree, shelling pease. He lay down on the ground, at a little distance, and watched her. He noted the quick, capable turn of her wrist and the dexterous motion of the brown hands as they snapped out the pease, and he thought how eminently sweet and comfortable it would be to take this bit of his youth back to France with him, or even to give up France and grow old with her at home.

"Mary," said he, "I sha'n't paint any picture of you this summer."

Mary laughed, and brushed back a yellow lock with the back of her hand. "No," said she, "I suppose not. Aunt Celia spoke of it yesterday. She told me the reason."

"What is Aunt Celia's most excellent theory?"

"She said I'm not so likely as I used to be."

"No," said Jerome, not answering her smile in the community of mirth they always had over Aunt Celia's simple speech. He rolled over on the grass and began to make a dandelion curl. "No, that's not it. You're a good deal likelier than you used to be. You're all possibilities now. I could make a Madonna out of you, quick as a wink. No, it's because I've decided to paint Marshby instead."

Mary's hands stilled themselves, and she looked at him anxiously. "Why are you doing that?" she asked.

"Don't you want the picture?"

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Give it to you, I guess. For a wedding-present, Mary."

"You mustn't say those things," said Mary, gravely. She went on working, but her face was serious.

"It's queer, isn't it," remarked Wilmer, after a pause, "this notion you've got that Marshby's the only one that could possibly do? I began asking you first."

"Please!" said Mary. Her eyes were full of tears. That was rare for her, and Wilmer saw it meant a shaken poise. She was less certain to-day of her own fate. It made her more responsively tender toward his. He sat up and looked at her.

"No," he said. "No. I won't ask you again. I never meant to. Only I have to speak of it once in a while. We should have such a tremendously good time together."

"We have a tremendously good time now," said Mary, the smile coming while she again put up the back of her hand and brushed her eyes. "When you're good."

"When I help all the other little boys at the table, and don't look at the nice heart-shaped cake I want myself? It's frosted, and got little pink things all over the top. There! don't drop the corners of your mouth. If I were asked what kind of a world I'd like to live in, I'd say one where the corners of Mary's mouth keep quirked up all the time. Let's talk about Marshby's picture. It's going to be your Marshby."

"What do you mean?"

"Not Marshby's Marshby—yours."

"You're not going to play some dreadful joke on him?" Her eyes were blazing under knotted brows.

"Mary!" Wilmer spoke gently, and though the tone recalled her, she could not forbear at once, in her hurt pride and loyalty.

"You're not going to put him into any masquerade?—to make him anything but what he is?"

"Mary, don't you think that's a little hard on an old chum?"

"I can't help it." Her cheeks were hot, though now it was with shame. "Yes, I am mean, jealous, envious. I see you with everything at your feet—"

"Not quite everything," said Jerome. "Not quite. I know it makes you hate me."

"No! no!" The real woman had awakened in her,

and she turned to him in a whole-hearted honesty. "Only, they say you do such wizard things when you paint. I never saw any of your pictures, you know, except the ones you did of me. And they're not *me*. They're lovely—angels with women's clothes on. Aunt Celia says if I looked like that I'd carry all before me. But, you see, you've always been—partial to me."

"And you think I'm not partial to Marshby?"

"It isn't that. It's only that they say you look inside people and drag out what is there. And inside him—oh, you'd see his hatred of himself!" The tears were rolling unregarded down her face.

"This is dreadful," said Wilmer, chiefly to himself. "Dreadful."

"There!" said Mary, drearily, emptying the pods from her apron into the basket at her side. "I suppose I've done it now. I've spoiled the picture."

"No," returned Jerome, thoughtfully, "you haven't spoiled the picture. Really I began it with a very definite conception of what I was going to do. It will be done in that way or not at all."

"You're very kind," said Mary humbly. "I didn't mean to act like this."

"No,"—he spoke out of a maze of reflection, not looking at her. "You have an idea he's under the microscope. It makes you nervous."

She nodded and then caught herself up.

"There's nothing you mightn't see," she said, proudly, ignoring her previous outburst. "You or anybody else, even with a microscope."

"No, of course not. Only you'd say microscopes aren't fair. Well, perhaps they're not. And portrait-

painting is a very simple matter. It's not the black art. But if I go on with this, you are to let me do it in my own way. You're not to look at it."

"Not even when you're not at work?"

"Not once, morning, noon, or night, till I invite you to. You were always a good fellow, Mary. You'll keep your word."

"No, I won't look at it," said Mary.

Thereafter she stayed away from the barn, not only when he was painting, but at other times, and Wilmer missed her. He worked very fast, and made his plans for sailing, and Aunt Celia loudly bemoaned his stinginess in cutting short the summer. One day, after breakfast, he sought out Mary again in the garden. She was snipping coreopsis for the dinner table, but she did it absently, and Jerome noted the heaviness of her eyes.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, abruptly, and she was shaken out of her late constraint. She looked up at him with a piteous smile.

"Nothing much," she said. "It doesn't matter. I suppose it's fate. He has written his letter."

"Marshby?"

"You knew he got his appointment?"

"No; I saw something had him by the heels, but he's been still as a fish."

"It came three days ago. He has decided not to take it. And it will break his heart."

"It will break your heart," Wilmer opened his lips to say; but he dared not jostle her mood of unconsidered frankness.

"I suppose I expected it," she went on. "I did

expect it. Yet he's been so different lately, it gave me a kind of hope."

Jerome started. "How has he been different?" he asked.

"More confident, less doubtful of himself. It's not anything he has said. It's in his speech, his walk. He even carries his head differently, as if he had a right to. Well, we talked half the night last night, and he went home to write the letter. He promised me not to mail it till he'd seen me once more; but nothing will make any difference."

"You won't beseech him?"

"No. He is a man. He must decide."

"You won't tell him what depends on it?"

"Nothing depends on it," said Mary, calmly. "Nothing except his own happiness. I shall find mine in letting him accept his life according to his own free will."

There was something majestic in her mental attitude. Wilmer felt how noble her full maturity was to be, and told himself, with a thrill of pride, that he had done well to love her.

"Marshby is coming," he said. "I want to show you both the picture."

Mary shook her head. "Not this morning," she told him, and he could see how meagre canvas and paint must seem to her after her vision of the body of life. But he took her hand.

"Come," he said, gently; "you must."

Still holding her flowers, she went with him, though her mind abode with her lost cause. Marshby halted when he saw them coming, and Jerome had time to

look at him. The man held himself wilfully erect, but his face betrayed him. It was haggard, smitten. He had not only met defeat; he had accepted it. Jerome nodded to him and went on before them to the barn. The picture stood there in a favoring light. Mary caught her breath sharply, and then all three were silent. Jerome stood there forgetful of them, his eyes on his completed work, and for the moment he had in it the triumph of one who sees intention brought to fruitage under perfect auspices. It meant more to him, that recognition, than any glowing moment of his youth. The scroll of his life unrolled before him, and he saw his past, as other men acclaimed it, running into the future ready for his hand to make. A great illumination touched the days to come. Brilliant in promise, they were yet barren of hope. For as surely as he had been able to set this seal on Mary's present, he saw how the thing itself would separate them. He had painted her ideal of Marshby; but whenever in the future she should nurse the man through the mental sickness bound always to delay his march, she would remember this moment with a pang, as something Jerome had dowered him with, not something he had attained unaided. Marshby faced them from the canvas, erect, undaunted, a soldier fronting the dawn, expectant of battle, yet with no dread of its event. He was not in any sense alien to himself. He dominated not by crude force, but through the sustained inward strength of him. It was not youth Jerome had given him. There was maturity in the face. It had its lines —the lines that are the scars of battle; but somehow not one suggested, even to the doubtful mind, a battle

lost. Jerome turned from the picture to the man himself, and had his own surprise. Marshby was transfigured. He breathed humility and hope. He stirred at Wilmer's motion.

"Am I"—he glowed—"could I have looked like that?" Then in the poignancy of the moment he saw how disloyal to the moment it was even to hint at what should have been, without snapping the link now into the welding present. He straightened himself and spoke brusquely, but to Mary:

"I'll go back and write that letter. Here is the one I wrote last night."

He took it from his pocket, tore it in two, and gave it to her. Then he turned away and walked with the soldier's step home through the garden. Jerome could not look at her. He began moving back the picture.

"There!" he said, "it's finished. Better make up your mind where you'll have it put. I shall be picking up my traps this morning."

Then Mary gave him his other surprise. Her hands were on his shoulders. Her eyes, full of the welling gratitude that is one kind of love, spoke like her lips.

"Oh!" said she, "do you think I don't know what you've done? I couldn't take it from anybody else. I couldn't let him take it. It's like standing beside him in battle; like lending him your horse, your sword. It's being a comrade. It's helping him fight. And he *will* fight. That's the glory of it!"

A MAN OF FEELING

JOHN SETON, speaking his concluding words on the lecture platform of the Club, was an inspiring sight to the ladies there before him, he looked so strong, so fit in every way for the struggle he had predicted. He was a young man who believed intensely in the validity of his subject, though he had to put it tentatively, because he was still modest enough to wonder sometimes whether, after all, he had found the very clearest window into the future. So he had announced himself under the wavering interrogation "Am I a socialist?" That seemed to throw the burden of proof on the ladies; and they, gazing at him from under furrowed brows, thought they knew: he looked too honest and impulsive not to take a stand, too significant, with that face made for tenderness and laughter.

"Won't you come home with us, Mr. Seton?" asked a matron, in the congratulatory crowd about him. "Come and have a cup of tea."

He was about to answer with the perfunctory courtesy of the man used to shunting social tributes, when something arrested his glance and held it for a second, inappreciable but significant. Mrs. Underhill was a lady of middle height and of a certain luxuriance of type which she had subdued to the note of the perfect dress she wore, a smoky gray with all the concomitants

of exquisite finishing, fur, and the gleam of the necessary chain that held her lorgnon. Her color was high, though not in the least coarsely so, and, wholesome as she was, she breathed out an inexplicable hint of being at the mercy of her own emotions. Seton, looking at her in the instant of her invitation, thought absently, with that part of his mind that was always commenting on the byplay of life, that he had seen precisely her type that morning at a tenement-house door: a woman fresh from easy battling at the tub, her face shining with health and a consciousness of warm benevolence toward her man, her children, and beyond them such of the world as did not interfere with their well-being. Two Underhill daughters, easily recognized as of the mother's blood, but of a reduced type—warm-hearted, small-brained, affectionate creatures waiting to do their duty to the world through some form of child-nurture—stood at her right side, their hands already in their muffs, an attitude of waiting with the patient symbolism of wrists in fetters. But at that instant of looking, Seton caught something like a message that did not mean to be a message: a ray from the blue eyes of the other daughter, standing at the left. She was younger than these two plump summoners to the dance of life, taller and slender, yet with every implication of strength, of a clear pink and white skin, hair light yellow, and gray eyes that told overmuch of themselves, and a nature that, without certainty of response, meant to tell nothing at all. Then Seton surprised himself.

"Thank you very much," he said, to the mother. "I will."

At once he seemed to have shuffled off his answers

to the interrogative clamor that might not have been needed if anybody had really listened to his talk, and made way for the ladies through the perplexed and surgent throng. He nearly always, after speaking, left the room—unless the audience had been of those whose beliefs, like his own, were partly crystallized—with an impression of frowning faces, brows tense under the impact of his revelations; and it was tiring. To-day he hardly cared at all. He was able to throw off the aura of the listening ladies, as his lungs got rid of the bad air, and presently he was in the car, being driven away.

Their progress itself offered a glimpse into the exuberant benevolence of his hostess. Her conversation, made up, at this juncture, of delight in Seton's lecture and wonder how any one could possibly live in the world and ignore its ill condition, was punctuated with little shrieks of caution to the chauffeur not to run over this man or that dog. Her attitude of mind seemed to be that of one who, almost alone in her perspicacity, has discovered how wilfully determined everybody is to run over everybody else, and that the only possible office for a well-wishing person is that of the voluble censor, the champion of plain decencies. Seton gathered that she was a lady of great emotional leisure, because she pounced upon the evidences of want or abuse, and waved and objurgated at things piteously commonplace in the every-day economy, things he had learned not to score his mind with, lest he should go really mad. But Mrs. Underhill had plenty of indignation and ruth to pour into the channel of mere noise. Before they reached the stately front

that walled her home, Seton had learned that she abominated persons who docked the tails of horses and dogs, used an overhead check, ground down the working-man, and did not remember that the apple-woman and the roasted-chestnut man had human rights. He, too, hated the sight of clipped animals, and was pretty sure his brother was his brother; but he had no more temptation to shriek about it than to go into a library where he might study the causes of things, and insist on chanting: "This is a. This is b. This is c." To all the mother's gush of warning and partisanship and robust solace of kindness, two of the daughters added little agreeing cries; but the golden-haired girl sat straight and said nothing. Seton saw that, for some reason, she could not by nature add her comment to the ever-springing leafage of benevolence beside her. She could not keep telling how she loved everybody and hated to have them hurt. For some reason, she could not.

When they had entered the rather dark hall, sombre with the hue of old wood, they were met by an avalanche of dogs—three only, but dogs so glad that they hurled themselves into a miniature exposition of all dogdom. Seton was presented to them, and given instantly an impression that they were far more important than he, and would continue to be, unless he should have the ill fortune to lose a hand or a job. Then the benevolence of the ladies might shift temporarily to the human side. The dogs—two Irish terriers, very fat, Nick and Con, and a bull, Elizabeth—had been out nearly all the afternoon, Mrs. Underhill was assured by the maid; but she detected disappointment

in their air, and called upon some daughter to give them one more run. The two reproductions of the mother type were immediately glad to go, and Annette, she who seemed to be a sort of odd one in the family atmosphere, went with Seton and her mother into the library, sumptuous in all conventional furnishings, and gravely made the tea. Here Mrs. Underhill told him, as if the confidence were his by right because he was studying the reform of the social structure, how very painful it was to her that everybody was not quite happy. She did not seem a lady who cared much about facts, or to have an urgent tendency toward their acquisition. She seemed only to be living in a kind of emotional glow generated by her own expression of kindliness, and to be sensuously alive to the pleasures of being sorry for people. Seton found impossible questions popping into his head as he followed her lead, questions as crude as if he asked her what her income was, or whether her glossy puffs were the growth of her own scalp or that of another. His unmanageable mind wanted to pelt her with inquiries as to how she could look so cheerful in particular when she felt so low about the general scheme, how she could dwell upon the prevailing gloom with such roseate unction. And having rattled off a series of impudent inquiries like these, his mind confided to him, as if it were a conclusion anybody might come to, that she had acquired her benevolence only after her children had grown up. This special sort of exuberant well-wishing might easily be another form of the natural passion hovering over a child's cot, and when the child no longer needed nurture, seeking another outlet. While these extraneous

conclusions amused themselves together in his mind, and he replied mechanically to offers of sugar and cream, he heard the maid, leaving the room, recalled by his hostess with a requisition for some special sandwich.

"Cut them, Susan," she was specifying, "very thin."

Susan's neat skirt was no sooner across the threshold than Mrs. Underhill turned to him with one of her smiles, half indulgent of herself as a woman of feeling, and not in the least concerned lest you find her so.

"I never," said she, "call them without wondering at the injustice of it all."

Seton's quick brown eyes asked for him exactly what it was she so deplored, and she answered at once:

"Susan, you know. I called her by her Christian name. We must, of course—but the injustice of it! Why isn't she calling me by my Christian name? Why am I not calling her Miss— Well, I don't remember what her surname is. But really isn't it unjust?"

Seton said, in a rather dazed way, that it didn't seem to him material.

"Oh, but it is material," said Mrs. Underhill. "I wonder you can talk as you have this afternoon, I wonder you can grasp the situation as you do, and not see how material it is."

Seton only thought her rather queer; but what he chiefly wanted was to get the young Annette to himself in some corner of the drawing-room or universe, it didn't matter where, and talk to her for a long time. He was frankly conscious of this: that there had never been anybody with such an appeal to him, such a trick of direct glances and grave sudden hidings of the eyes,

with such an implication of having her own serious thoughts and nobody to help her out when they grew too troublesome. He even had a desire to tell Mrs. Underhill that, if she had this degree of longing to spend her sympathy on a world in need, she might first lavish a little of it on her young daughter. How, he could not have told. Only he was conscious of her as a cause. But now Mrs. Underhill was telling him how impossible she found it to accept the world as it is, and how she was almost sure she was a socialist. One could hardly help being who had any eyes or ears; yet her husband wouldn't sympathize in the least. He never had sympathized.

"Mother!" said the girl, in a low, reminding voice.

Yet when her mother turned at the sound of it, Annette proffered only a request for more bread, or sugar, or some of the necessaries of the tea table, where she had ceased to preside when the tea was ready. Still, the tone had been a reminder. He knew it. And now Mrs. Underhill, summoned to a telephone interview, left them, as the sandwiches came in, and Seton felt that his chance had come, and turned to the girl with such bright eagerness that she, turning to him with just such an involuntary appeal, yet sat with lips parted, not speaking, and evidently surprised by the ardency of his challenge. Now Seton had nothing to say. The trouble was he had everything to say. The girl herself, that was his instant concern. What was she? What was there underneath her calm that clamored to be heard, to be heard by him especially? She was the one to begin.

"My father—" she burst forth, with an instant

brightening of the eyes— "he's not—you mustn't think he isn't sympathetic."

"No," said Seton, irrationally, bent only on reassuring her. "I'm sure he is."

"It's only that"—she seemed to seek about for something sufficiently illuminating and yet not overdrawn—"he can't express himself. I understand him perfectly."

"It's a mighty big question for men—men of affairs." Seton tried his way. "It has a good many bearings. Those of us that talk—well, we can make a very pretty scheme of a reconstructed world; but I wouldn't be the one to undertake to govern it. You upset so many balances."

But she was not listening at all. Her eyes had taken on a grave solemnity. They questioned him as if they asked one thing only: whether she might trust him. Then, having drawn her conclusion, she spoke.

"My father has gone away." It sounded like the statement of a calamity. "We don't know where."

There seemed to be nothing he could answer. Strangely, for all his slight knowledge of her, it was apparent to him that there was something she wanted him to do, and this was why she had spoken. That was the point he answered.

"You want to know," he hazarded, "you want to know where he is?"

Her eyes filled with tears, so slowly, with such a contraction, that he knew how it hurt. She nodded slightly.

"First his dog went, his old dog Pat. Then father had a talk with me. He said he was going to be

away a good deal now; not for always, but simply a good deal. I asked if he was going to Europe, and he said he might go, but not at once. If he did go, he'd let us know, so we might know where to find him; but at present he should simply not be living at home."

"But surely—" Then Seton changed this, from a certainty that surely the man's wife would know where he was, to the more gracious supposition, "And your mother of course knows no more than this?"

"He told her she was not to worry. If we needed him, he'd be here. So that makes me think he isn't so far away."

Her slender, ringless hands were in her lap now, interlacing painfully, and by their grip on each other counselling her to keep emotion curbed. Seton was bitterly, extravagantly sorry for her. And he was not astonished at this challenge of his help and sympathy, because, as strong as his certainty that she would not for worlds have bared her heart to chance confidence, was his feeling that it had been perfectly sane and natural to do it now. But he was throwing his mind into the channel of practical conjecture.

"May I ask you"—it seemed possible to ask anything—"if your father is in business of any sort?"

He had inevitably gone there for the secret, and she answered him at once.

"No; papa's retired. He made a lot of money—Underhill and Green—cloth, you know, cotton-mills—and he went out three years ago. No, he isn't worried about money. He's just gone away."

Had she been less immediate to his concern, he would have wanted to reply: "Yes, but people don't disappear

for nothing. Don't look any further. You'll find something you'd rather not hear." But she had thrown over him the spell of her sincere belief, and he answered reflectively, "I see," though really he saw nothing at all but her candid eyes. Now she was gathering at once and casting at him the real burden of her argument.

"And what I wanted is this: you go about in all sorts of places—"

"I have to, you know," he put in, because it seemed for the first time unusual to choose to go about in diverse places. "If you're on a newspaper you have to."

"Oh, I know. And if you hadn't gone to the town where they had the prize-fight you wouldn't have been there to look into the strike. Well, you're likely to go anywhere, aren't you?"

"To the ends of the earth," said Seton gravely. He took a solemn pleasure in meaning he would go to the ends of the earth for her, and knowing she could not by any possibility guess he meant it.

"And so," said she, in the accelerated tone that would have been less distinguishable than a whisper even to any one just outside the sill, "if you should see my father—he's not very tall, and he's got a scar right across his face here—he got it in Germany—I want you to tell him to write, to please, please write."

Seton accepted it, the extravagant romance of it, the remote possibility that he should come by chance upon a father not very tall, with a scar across his face, and bowed gravely, as if such nebulous commissions were part of every day's work.

"You want to see him like the dickens," he hazarded,

and she hastened to correct him, with a quick loyalty to the absent.

"No, no. That isn't it. If he needs to be away, why, he has to be. I feel that. Only if I could know—if I could know just where—if anything should happen to him—" Here her face was suffused again, and the like of those other painful tears came and gave her eyes a sombre pathos.

Seton hardly knew what he was to think of a father who could wilfully ignore such grief. Then all at once Mrs. Underhill had done with her interview and the dogs with their walk, and daughters, mother, and dogs came in together, all a voluble interchange of comment on a world made for the comfort of dogs. Mrs. Underhill distributed lumps of sugar, and confided to Seton, while the dogs crunched with dripping jaws, that it was of no use in that house to think dogs could be brought up as dogs. She knew it all, the whole horrid formula: one meal a day and dog-biscuit at night, and how did we think we should like to be treated like that? Then she conveyed a terrier up her silken and very sloping lap, and Seton had an absurd feeling that she was going to ask in a minute whether he didn't think it a wrong to call dogs by their first names. And while the other daughters had their tea and the dogs were crowded with sippets and lumps, Annette sat still, her grave eyes not regarding what was evidently the accustomed scene, but looking very tired.

When Seton rose to take his leave, Mrs. Underhill at once invited him to dinner for the following night. She was very selfish, she said. She had a thousand things to ask him that he hadn't so much as touched on

in his lecture. She supposed the upshot would be that when he really told her all the reasons why he was a socialist, she should be able to find out whether she was one, too. Seton had an engagement for the next evening—the theatre, with another man; but he promptly cancelled it and expressed his great pleasure in coming here to dine. When he left the house he felt like shaking himself like a dog running out of the water; the saccharine benevolences dripping from that hospitable roof seemed to have drenched him through and through, and his accustomed habit of thought felt cold and slippery. It was enough, he said, with a rueful head-shake at the moon, looking so incongruous there at the end of the street, to make you forswear brotherly love, heroic doses were so weakening. Then his mind leaped to Annette, so vivid in her appeal to him while they were alone, so pathetic in her lassitude when she gave him a hand at parting, and he knew he could breast even those tumultuous seas of fraternity to find her.

He sat more than once at Mrs. Underhill's table; but the impression of that first hour was only intensified. Annette's confidence was not repeated. Her face never even seemed to interrogate him for news. She had apparently given the conduct of his adventure, his task of finding a man with a scar across the face, into his own hand, and was waiting with a hopeful confidence until he should have done something with it. He saw that, and saw also, with a compassionate wonder whether it might be hard for her, how foreign she was to the atmosphere of the house, how gently passive in it. For once inside the door, he felt as if he had embarked in a tossing sea of violent kindliness, throwing him from

one wave to another of pity for this and indignation over that. Annette, in her little boat on the same sea, had the air of riding passively and gracefully over the waves, the exhilaration of being so exceedingly warm-hearted, which prevailed with Mrs. Underhill, and the depression because other people were not warm-hearted enough. This idea of the boat got such hold on him that in the midst of his most breathless tasks, when he had scant time to think of extraneous things and Annette least of all, she was so moving to him, he would suddenly have the vision of her in the tossing skiff, her hands folded, her lips a little apart, her eyes fixed unfadingly on some point: perhaps the indeterminate shore where walked a man with a scar across his face. He wondered if she were unhappy beyond the reaches of that longing for her father. He knew he should have been wretched to the point of breaking amid that chorus of love to humanity, in which, though all his mind had been travelling for the last three years toward more just conditions for the race, he could not join. He was a stanch lover of dogs; but the Underhill dogs he hated with the nervous aloofness you feel toward the innocent cause of any electric storm. They had all the silken cushions they chose to take, chairs were sacred to them, their least preference was consulted in the matter of food, and a fusillade of endearment rang through the house. Yet they were not inordinately spoiled. They were good, self-respecting dogs at heart, placed in a ridiculous position. He had an idea that if he could take them into the open for a walk, with a camp-fire, and a bone to gnaw, and a cuff here and an ear-rubbing there, they would get back to dogdom once

more and he could like them. But with their pottering strolls and leashed security, their pampered instincts, they were getting "soft", and he felt a disproportionate rage over the wrong done them by idle womankind. And then he would chide himself and ask what could you do with a dog in the city? You had to guard and leash him. But nevertheless, whenever he saw them in their cloistered ease, he found himself saying, "Poor devils", and wishing they could smell a little life.

He had not been lecturing for some time now. That was an intermittent affair, wedged in where he could place it, between stunts of journalism. It had come about from the book he had written, wherein he had tried to formulate his own miserable certainty that industrial conditions are all wrong in some such way as would make the acquiescent stop to wonder, as he had, and then perhaps give a push to the old chariot of privilege. The book had been well written, and it had somehow, by that mysterious law we call luck, found its way, like a text-book of a sort, into the hands of women who want the latest thing in brains. Therefore it was to clubs chiefly he had spoken.

And now one day he was summoned, by a letter written in a small, rather cramped hand and expressed in the phraseology of business, to a street he knew in a clean, philistine slab of the city, where lodging-houses abounded, and all occupations jostled one another and let one another live in peace, because there was no time to be inordinately curious or particular. With all these people, the fight was on: with the landladies for the renting of their rooms, with the lodgers to keep the place, whatever it was, that gave them the money

to hire the rooms. When you got into this quarter of the city you were "up against" the hand-to-hand struggle for bed and board with no luxuries. These were not the submerged and hopeless. They were the decent working men and women who see no prospect but work, and ask no favors but an honest wage. At any other moment Seton might not have regarded the letter, though it carried an intimate authority of its own, as some letters do; but the times were drab-colored and had been for a week. Annette had been away at a country house, and he had somehow fancied that his welcome with Mrs. Underhill had paled its lustre by a degree. He wondered if the sum of benevolence was not to shine on him with its full continued radiance, and that made him nervous. For there was Annette.

And having an hour at the end of the day, he took his stick and walked briskly down to the brick house, like its neighbors in the dull street, rang the bell, and asked for Mr. C. T. Charles. There was no hesitation. He was in, the bewigged, enormous landlady said, and would Seton "go right up". That seemed to be the custom of the house, and it was also a manifest cruelty to expect any landlady of that bulk to essay even two flights in heralding; so Seton thanked her, ascended the stairs not too briskly, lest he remind her of her own quiescence, and knocked at a yellowed door. It was not opened at once, and he had time to observe how exactly the gilt-scrolled paper patterned all the other paper of such houses, when there was a stirring within, the door opened, and he found himself confronting a thin, gray-haired man with a scar from his cheek-bone nearly to the corner of his mouth. But that was not so significant.

He had, under bushy, unkempt brows, withdrawn as if by the shrinking of age, Annette's eyes. That settled it. Altogether it was what could be called a lovable face. All the lines in its thin dryness were kind, and the mouth, not really hidden by a short gray mustache, was tenderness itself. So instantly grounded was Seton's conviction that this was the man with the precise scar that he would not have been surprised if his summoner's first question had been, "How's Annette?" But the man only opened the door wider, and said in a gentle voice that had fallen into a nervous habit of haste:

"Mr. Seton, this is very obliging of you. Come in."

So Seton went in, and they sat down in two horribly constructed oak chairs, upholstered in a plush that was much indebted to time for fading it. And as if he had been summoned by Annette's old reference to him, a gaunt Irish terrier poked forward from some corner, smelled at Seton's trousers, suffered his touch, and then cast himself, with a sigh, at his master's feet. Seton was aware that his host was regarding him with a scrutiny that momentarily banished the lustre of his eyes and drew them to a glittering smallness.

"I've never seen you so close," said the man, in immediate explanation, as if he knew he was staring and formulating. "I've heard you lecture."

"We haven't met?" said Seton, interrogatively. He knew they hadn't, because Annette's sparse description had now become the most valid evidence.

"No. I've read your book, too. You're a young man."

Seton had had that fact handed him in various forms:

sometimes, when it concerned his reactionary theories, as damaging to him; once or twice, when he wanted promotion, as something in his favor. But this man stated it very neutrally, and he felt bound for some reason to tell him.

"Twenty-six."

"Ah! You've got it all before you."

This seemed to be neither commiseration nor envy. It was merely the weighing of chances, Seton saw, and he nodded in answer.

"Yes," he said. "I hope there's a good deal before me."

"I might as well come to the point," said the other. He was holding the corrugated arms of his chair tightly with slender hands, as if that were a form of controlled nervousness he might allow himself. "You're a busy man. Are you attached to your profession?"

"Journalism?"

"Yes. Are you attached to it?"

"Why!" said Seton, doubtfully, "why!"

That was all he could say for the moment. It was so complex a thing. He liked the strain and "go" of it, the scant praise and sudden rough commendation when he had handed in a good story. On the other hand, he was conscious of an undercurrent of determination to write other things when he should have learned to write better and of assuaging that soft spot in him by seeing if the world need be so stupid in arranging its affairs. As he still kept his puzzled silence, the other spoke again, with the air of putting down a second card, not having perhaps played quite fairly.

"I ought to explain myself a little. You can't be expected to act in the dark. Now, you're a socialist."

Seton said nothing. His book told that, he knew; and his spoken utterances implied it.

"So'm I," said the host, "so'm I. I don't say you made me one, but you helped me along. Your book was so simple. It's elementary. That's what I need. And it's all so puzzling."

He looked at Seton with a frank implication of not being wise, not being able to think out anything, but just of suffering. That was the last thing he meant to imply. He would, Seton knew, not only because he was manly, but because he was sensitive to the verge of lost control, have realized that to obtrude your own sense of the wretchedness of the world on a world that has as much as it can bear, is only to inject another drop of ink into waters already murky. His delicate face, ready, it might be, to quiver, told that, yet the line of his mouth added the balancing determination that something must be done. Seton had many a time, in moments of low vitality, cursed his own futile wretchedness over the suffering of the world; but the strength of his youth prevailed, and he had, in another day, with a whiff of air, overborne it and started again with no less irrational courage on the path to betterment. But here was a man, he saw, who had suffered, in a life more than twice as long as his, an equal misery, and had now no compensatory youth to help him through.

"Things are in a bad way," the man was saying, as if he didn't really know how to put into words the enormity of what rested upon him, and had to make it

as simple as possible. "It used to hound me down. Always hounded me. I thought one time 'twould hound me out of life."

"That's the way," Seton confirmed him. "That's the way it takes us."

"I thought then 'twas something we'd got to bear. I thought 'twas the state of the world. Folks said 'twas the will of God. I never thought that, I guess. If I had, I shouldn't have been able to serve under a God like that. Well, sir, if there's a remedy—"

He paused and his eyes came out of their hiding and besought Seton to say again that there was one.

"There's got to be," said Seton. It was all he could honestly swear.

The other man nodded, as if he thanked him for even so small a grace.

"Of course I don't altogether see it," he owned. "I'm old-fashioned. I've spent my brains, what I had of 'em, in making the thing go. Business, you know, that sort of thing. Of course I don't see how you're going to reckon with human nature. Seems to me the man we're throttling now, when we give him the chance to live and breathe and get some blood into him—seems to me he's just as like as not to turn into the kind that throttles the man under him. I don't know. I have a kind of a theory that the Napoleons and the robbers and the grafters, rich or poor, are going to keep on being born for quite a spell—Well, well, we won't talk of that. Tires my head. I try not to think of 'em."

His harassment over the unequal burdens of life came out suddenly all over him in the rigidity of his controlled figure, the appeal—almost articulate—of

his glance, and Seton had an answering pang of wretched fellowship, a savage desire to forbid his making them irretrievably miserable together. But by a big effort the man had evidently pulled himself up out of the slough where they both knew they must not flounder.

'So," said he, "I've come to a conclusion. I can't do anything. Don't see what there is to be done that won't upset the kettle of fish on the other side. But your book makes it pretty plain to me that it's the System we've got to fight. That's what's the matter—the System."

"Yes," said Seton, emerging into the clearer light of the few certainties he had, "it's the System."

"Now we're getting somewhere." He was, outwardly at least, unshaken by his sense of horror at the vision of temporary wrong. "Now, I've made my money by the System. I'm going to spend it—what I don't owe to other people—I'm going to spend it fighting the System I made it by."

Was Annette one of the other people? Was it the exuberant trio, the satiated dogs, that were to have had the spending of it? Seton made no answer, nor did the other man seem to expect one.

"So," he began again, in exactly the same fragmentary fashion, "when I saw you, I saw you knew there was a remedy. You were cocksure. Now I want to buy your time. You can put it in as you like, lectures, books, research—I don't confine you to this country: go where you please. Only I'll back you to do what I haven't the youth, the strength—brains, too, sir, the brains—to do for myself. How's that? What do you say?"

He was regarding Seton now with a sudden smile that illuminated his face into an unmistakable beauty. Seton was silent for a moment from the inability to get hold of it all. Yet it seemed very reasonable, the man himself was so simple, so frank, so true.

"To fight the System?" Seton repeated, stupidly.

The other man nodded, with a look of almost savage will in the compression of his lips.

"The System," said he, as if he were toasting it. "That's what's the matter. Stamp it out. I'm backing you."

Then suddenly Seton's wits came with a rush, and he knew one only question had to be answered first.

"I have a message for you," said he. "It's from Annette."

The other man sprang up so violently that the dog at his feet, thrown as suddenly out of his dream, sprang also and sat down a yard away, fixing his master with reproachful eyes. Seton went on at once in a swift flow of narrative. He told what had led him to that house. He made no secret that it was not the mother's invitation, but the unconscious call of Annette's face. And ending, he threw at the other man the question he thought he had the necessity if not the right to ask. They couldn't give him so many keys unless they gave him the key to the house itself.

"What made you come down here?"

Underhill took the question in a perfectly good part, but the answer seemed to be beyond him. He had stepped thoughtfully back to his chair; and the dog, waiting for that only, dropped again, his head at his master's toe, as if to say if there were further mobiliza-

tion he should at least know it as soon as anybody. Underhill seemed to be thinking. He looked at Seton and his face worked.

"I can't! I can't!"

That was all he seemed able to say.

"Your daughter wants you tremendously," Seton ventured.

"Yes." This came in a quick burst of what might have been longing for her, a confident pride in her affection for him, and an accepted grief that things had to be as they were. "If it was Annette alone, I could take Annette to live with me!" There he paused, looked most hopelessly at Seton, and shook his head. "No," he said, "you can't understand it. Nobody could. I'm a queer Dick. What's the use?"

But Seton was bound to understand. For the sake of Annette and her beseeching eyes he meant to push his way at once inside this defended pale. The phrase of Mrs. Underhill herself leaped into his mind.

"I see," he said; "you have to get away by yourself. It's not—not sympathetic."

Underhill clutched at the word, but in a special sense.

"That's it," said he, "it's too damned sympathetic. I can't stand it, Seton. Can't stand the outcry. That's what it is all the time, outcry. It's about everything. If you've got a wound you bandage it up, don't you? You try to forget it. Well, they don't. They can't. My wife's a good woman—two girls just like her—well, they're always seeing where folks bleed and telling you of it, and I can't stand it, Seton, can't, to save my life I can't. So Pat and I came off down here."

Seton understood so poignantly that he had nothing

to say. The father of the family had not been able to endure the tossing of the boat on the emotional waves. And in a moment Underhill seemed to pass him another key—a smaller one, but of use.

"You won't understand it, but I actually got to hating the dogs. Then I saw 'twas time to go, Pat and I. I'm very fond of dogs, but I can't stand outcry. Can't, can't. Don't you see, when folks are as extreme as that, they don't leave you anything. You've got to scream as loud as they do. I've often felt it about the children. My wife lavished things on 'em so she didn't leave me anything to do. I should have had to gild 'em all over, or bellow, if I wanted to tell 'em they were good girls. All but Annette. Annette's the one. She'd understand. Always has. Well!"

His eyes, like Annette's own, were appealing for something. Was it, Seton wondered, that he should not leave him to the loneliness of being queer and old, of having no valid ground to stand on because custom and ethics themselves might be warning him back to the tossing boat? And Seton laughed. That seemed to be the best thing he could do, to confirm the other man's title to this poor little refuge he had snatched.

"They're terribly kind ladies," said he. "I guess we're reactions, you and I."

Underhill's worn face looked pathetically grateful; but he threw off even that appeal in a trembling haste.

"How is it," said he, "about the other thing? Going to let me back you?"

Seton shook his head. He was sure of that, and yet he couldn't stop to talk about it.

"I don't know how to put it," said he, "but a chap's

got to stand on his own feet. If I were a little more stuck on myself! No, I can't do it. I should get punky in a year. What shall I tell Annette?"

Her father considered.

"You tell Annette," said he, "tell her I'm all right. She's a good girl. I miss her like the Old Harry. But I don't see how I can let her in. It's a queer position—making her keep a secret from her mother. When she's a little older she can choose. Maybe she might choose to come to me. Or if she married, maybe she'd marry a good chap and I'd drop in."

Seton got out of his chair with a bound, disconcerting to Pat, the lover of ordered ways.

"I'll tell you this," said he: "You won't drop in. You'll come and stay for good. I'll tell you that right now."

THE LANTERN

MARSHALL BRUCE and his wife, Janie, lived in a flat ingeniously contrived to be hot in summer and, by a defective system of heating, very cold in winter. They had perched there for three years during the weaving of their fortunes, sometimes hilariously intent on the uncouth advantages of the place, overlooking, as it did, a corner of life far removed from their own, except in anxious work and vagueness in regard to the next month's rent. That was like having an uncomfortable seat at a dreary realistic play. Or again when the fount of hope got choked and ceased temporarily to bubble, they recoiled from the tawdriness of it all, and wondered whether it would not have been better for Marshall to keep his professional post in the little academy, and for Janie to go on teaching literature under him, rather than to vault the cruel barbed wire into journalism, there to throw and be overthrown.

On this July evening, the flat was feeling the heat. Janie sat in the kitchen commanding the court where her neighbors had settled themselves for prolonged hours of unreserved revel, challenging their own jaded inner forces to counteract the atmospheric enemy without. They laughed loudly at intervals, in momentary uplift when some one of them, Janie knew through previous observation, made a foray upon a neighboring

drug store, and returned with dishes of ice cream the mind shuddered to contemplate. She knew exactly how they looked, the men coatless, the women slatternly in *lingerie* waists profusely trellised with a "letting-in" of cheap lace, and the children, innocent of the dictum that boys and girls should be in retreat by the time it is dark under the table, alternating the wail of fretfulness with the shriek of an unlovely mirth. This was not one of the times when Janie could regard them all joyously as a picture of life, or warmly as a part of the great family wherein they seemed to be workers of a degree only less humble than her own. She was affronted by the city summer, tired of prolonged care, and she could but think of a circle in an ingeniously contrived inferno where lost spirits suffered not only the torture of their own habitat but that of the outcry from the one below. In a street not far away a talking machine started on its interminable jargon, chiming in terrifying commentary with her own mental lamentations. She would not have been surprised if the talking machine had broken suddenly into Brocken cries.

Proofs of a modest story long ago paid for and the proceeds eaten up, lay on the table before her, ready to be stamped and mailed, and she knew Marshall, in the front room, was poring over the last of his masterly series, a more exacting task, and therefore to be carried on in the fractionally less torrid portion of the house. Janie always insisted that she preferred the kitchen for her work because it seemed more secluded, and Marshall innocently agreed. He had not even known how she had held her breath and guarded him through the year

when he was getting his material for this set of magazine articles on Elisha Porson, the bogy of all commercial circles, execrated by thousands who had served him and then gone under when they attempted to seek out the sources of the golden flood for which they dug the channel. There was to be no overflow, they found. The drops were all to run swiftly to one hoard. So the articles, now appearing, had proved. They were in effect an attack on Porson, his methods and his personal integrity, and through him, an onslaught upon modern business.

Marshall, when he had been asked to ride forth for the slaying of Porson, had felt a high commercial triumph of his own, and with that the righteous valor of the knight-errant. Janie had known he was the man commissioned to do a big deed. That first flame of eagerness had lighted her through three-quarters of the task. What Marshall felt about it now, what immediate force was hurrying him, she did not know. Of one thing she was sure: he thought with her of the tangible reward if the articles ultimately "made good". For they were lifting an obscure magazine to an amazing circulation, and the publishers were just men. They would double and treble what he had been promised in advance, and that would mean a move from the flat overlooking the court, even a month in England benignly beckoning them, and, most of all, more work. But of these palliations to the task Janie was not thinking to-night as she leaned back in her chair, one arm lying along the table, her fingers holding the pen. She was thinking of life itself, the web embroidered by figures, Porson and these uncouth creatures in the

court, though it looked less to her like a fabric than it sometimes did, a fabric stirred by a battling wind so that the figures themselves moved purposely. It was in some manner alive, though formless, a savage power bent on ruin.

Marshall, in the other room, pushed back his chair, and she came to herself with an instant call upon her every-day look of watchful sympathy. She was on guard, ready to do him service from filling his pen or pipe to speeding off on desperate foraging flights for the material he might suddenly lack. She heard his slippered feet along the corridor, and then saw him before her, strong, flushed, splendid to her gaze with the distinctions she loved in him: the kind gray eyes set wide apart, the warm hair tumbling over his forehead and his comprehensive look of youth and power. Tired as he was, he looked for the moment instinct with triumph.

"Well," said he, "it's done."

"Done!" The echo was not interrogative. It seemed rather a wondering comment on such a fact.

He began a tattoo on the oven of the gas stove, and she noted idly how fine his hand was, used to athletic tasks and fitted to hold the pen.

"They'll set it up at once," she said, languidly.

"Yes. I shall have the proof this week. Then we've done with Porson—done with him, done with him. *Vale*, Elisha Porson! Avaunt! Get out! You have served your turn. The tale of your iniquities is complete, and it now remains for you to get the monopoly of sackcloth and ashes, and we will hie us from your crumbling ruins to other jobs." He was fantastically

gesticulating over the sink where, in a moment, he proposed to let the water run through the filter preparatory to a cooling draught, when he turned to her for a responsive glance. He noted her pallor, the dark circles on her cheek, and sprang to her with dismay. "Why, old girl," said he, "you're done up."

Tears were squeezing themselves out under her dropped eyelids.

"Yes," she said, "I've known myself to be ruggeder. Don't hug me here, Marsh. The court'll see us. There! I told you. Hear them yell. Come off into the den, and we can talk."

His arm about her, they did go, and in the den, littered still with his cast-off manuscript, he turned the light up to see if she really looked as alarmingly bad as he feared. She was on the sofa now, her head thrown back against her lifted arms. He took his own chair and watched her, a frown between his anxious eyes. In a minute she laughed.

"I'll tell you what it is, Marsh," she said. "It's Porson. This is his revenge."

"You got too tired over him. You've let down, now the race is over. Take it as I do. Don't say, what a devil of a time we've had with him. Say, we've done with him."

"I feel as if we never should be done with him." She opened her eyes heavily for a moment, and closed them again because they had fallen on his completed work. Something had to remind her at every turn of Elisha Porson, the adversary of mankind as she had grown to think him, and so her adversary, also. But with her husband's anxious eyes upon her she was

bound to help him. "Don't you find yourself crushed by all this investigation, Marsh?" she asked. "Somehow sapped—depleted?"

He was frowning at the effort to understand.

"No," he said, at once. "I feel as a lawyer does after he's won a nasty case. He hasn't enjoyed the evidence; but it's means to an end. It buys conviction. It serves justice. And for him it spells triumph."

"I can't think of the triumph just this minute. I'm certain we've learned things we wish we hadn't known."

"Nonsense! The things are. If they exist, why not know them?"

"It seems as if what we call business is a fight—a terrible fight, too terrible to look on at."

"It is." The man's confirming dictum came quick and sharp on the heels of her wavering commentary.

"I feel as if money were evil."

"So the preacher says," Marshall echoed gayly, "the root of all evil—or is it the love of it? I bet we could use a pocketful of it, allee samee.

"Do you know what Porson has made me see?"

"He's made me see a number of things. One is, that he'll be the better for a taste of brimstone. I could wish he'd had it years ago."

"He's made the world hideous."

"Oh, come, Janie! not the world."

"Yes, the world, because it wants to get on. And we shall be just like him the minute we begin to fight for money to lift us above other people—well, the people out there." She did not need to indicate the court, even with a glance. The discord of acclamation was floating toward them through the flat, and both of

them thought absently that it was hailing a new consignment of ice-cream. "I'm convinced that Porson hasn't one decent humane impulse left."

"Well, if he has, I've failed to spot it. However, let's be charitable. Let's say he never had any to begin with."

"He can't have been a monster. Remember, he supported his mother——"

"'From that date,'" Marshall quoted, rhetorically, "'the date of his obtaining a position in the shoe-store, his mother ceased sewing for a living, and young Elisha supported her in a modest way, always bettering with his rising fortunes.'"

"That's it," said Janie. "He was human to start with, but now he's made himself into a machine. It goes whirling over the green grass of the world, cutting off heads."

"Can't put that in," said Marshall, who had cocked his head with an air of listening toward business ends. "Too flowery!"

"And the worst of it is, he's made me see he's not an exception. He's only noteworthy because he's got more brain than the others—more of that hideous power of tending money and making it breed. The men that fought him—they're the same kind, only they didn't win."

"The fierce light that beats upon a financier," remarked Marshall.

But she was moving him. He might stave her off, yet he, too, felt a decent recoil after the bad company they had been keeping. He, too, was morally jaded, though he would not own it. He, as became a man,

was taking "the world but as the world", and yet his longings clove to the green hills of peace. His homesick eyes could not discern them in the distance. The world seemed suddenly turned into a great industrial battlefield where homely virtues were trodden out under the foot of the mercenaries hired to fight for some Napoleon no more greedy then they, but more masterful.

"We've got our punishment for meddling with him," said Janie, bitterly. "We've painted a portrait, and the picture is going to stay with us. It's hanging right here on our wall. You see it. I see it. The eyes follow us, even when we aren't looking at it."

"Don't," said Marshall, involuntarily.

"Oh, it's a true portrait. I own that. We've caught the exact likeness—of a man who isn't a man any more. He's a horribly intelligent force. He can make me believe all the other men that copy him and fight him are hideous forces, too. We shall be, Marsh, if we try to keep on our feet in this awful scramble and rush. Why, I don't dare to wish we could go to Europe or even move out of here, because it means fighting for money——"

The bell in the hall rang with a jarring dissonance. Janie started to her feet, and Marshall threw down his paper knife and went to the tube.

"Yes," she heard him say. "Who is it? Come up. Fifth floor."

Almost immediately he had returned to her and arrested her flight to the dark back parlor where, remembering her disarray, she was betaking herself. His face itself stopped her. It was blazing, with what emotion she could not yet tell, wonder, perhaps bitter-

ness, an ironic gayety. His hand was heavy on her wrist.

"Who do you think it is?" he asked, rapidly.

She shook her head.

"Porson himself."

"Elisha Porson?"

He nodded, the sparkling commentary of his face intensifying.

"The fool!" he breathed.

Slow, rather cautious steps were nearing on the stairs.

"What have I told you about the cleverest of men? Take them out of their own grooves and they go to pieces. He knows leather, he knows the market; but here he is walking straight into my mouth to lie down in it."

"What does he want, Marsh?" she whispered. All her own acumen had deserted her. She asked the question as simply as a child.

"Want?" Marshall repeated, savagely. A terrible anticipatory triumph was in his look. "He's read the first number, perhaps the second, and he wants to buy me off—the fool!"

The steps halted at the door. Janie fled into the back room and sank on a chair. She was effectually awakened, as if by a piercing call from some emergency. It was reasonable to her, as to her husband, that Porson should want to bribe them, and even that he should innocently try it. She saw her husband with the hoard of gold laid open before him, and knew proudly he would refuse to look.

Marshall threw open the door.

"Come in, Mr. Porson," she heard him say.

Then the door closed and the varying steps, Porson's shuffling slightly as those of an old man not very painstakingly shod, and her husband's decisive, as if all his youth and scorn of paltering found expression there, came in together.

"Sit here," said Marshall, again abruptly, and took his own place at the desk.

The gas, whether by Marshall's intention or not, shone full on Porson's face, and Janie, bending forward there in the dark, trembled at it, seeing it with an added significance in the light of her own home. She had studied his portrait in its various stages of development; the boy in the daguerreotype, with the inconsequent mouth and smooth hair, the youth beginning to show the peering shrewdness of his later years as he realized where accumulation might place him, the middle-aged man with the mean lines of greed and the rigorous ones of mastery about his eyes and mouth, and the man himself as he footed it down town in the morning, his only walk for the day before his task of incubating the eggs of riches and fighting off the others who would steal his nest. She and Marshall had worked so long over that composite portrait that Porson's features had acquired for them an exaggerated significance, and now that he had walked into their very presence, her heart beat hard at the thought that, despite hospitable honor, they might enrich the image by one line more. He laid his battered hat on the table, the tile that figured invariably in the caricatures of him, and passed a knotted hand wearily through his thin hair with the gesture fitted to locks that had begun by being thick. He started a little, and lifted his head alertly.

"Who's in there?" he asked, pointing a thumb at the back room.

"My wife," said Marshall, at once.

"I prefer to see you alone," Porson announced, with the air of one who is accustomed to getting what he asks for. It was not the full, noble note of command. His high querulous voice would never compass that. It bespoke rather the habit of a dominance tedious but necessary.

At once Janie, from no considered impulse except as the result of the directness of her own nature, bent always on the straightest path, rose and came forward into the circle of light. Marshall got up and with a somewhat accented courtesy to mark his tenderness for her and insure her against rebuff, drew forward a chair. She stood still in the illuminated radius, a small figure, her pale golden hair drooping about her child-like face, and looked at Porson, half with an inevitable aversion and half appealingly because she wanted very much to stay. Porson regarded her for a moment, not, Marshall angrily noted, as if he saw her distinctive charm, but as if she were a figure in the path. He got up then, as if by an afterthought, not grudgingly, but because he seemed to be remembering that rising to greet a woman was a custom mysteriously decreed, and one that, leading to unknown ends, he might not neglect.

"How do you do?" he conceded, in his rasping voice. But he looked at Marshall immediately with the unaltered requirement that the figure should be removed.

"My wife is my literary partner," said Marshall, answering the glance. "She helps me collect my

material and pronounces on the stuff. It's as much her work as mine."

Janie, who knew him so well, read in his air, rather than his voice, the uneasiness of thinking it would be incalculable disappointment if Porson should refuse the gauge thrown down and say he would not speak at all. She took the matter into her own hands.

"I'll go out, Marshall," she said quickly. "Mr. Porson won't mind my being in the next room, even if I do hear. Our flat is so tiny," she explained to the visitor, with an unwilling smile—it came before she had time to think how she hated Porson—"we hear from one end of it to the other."

At that Porson turned his small eyes on her and seemed, for purposes of his own, to estimate and accept her.

"Well! well!" he said, with an impatient movement of the hands. "Well! well! But"—he raised the discordant voice a little—"this interview is confidential."

"Certainly," said Janie, with dignity. "That is understood."

She withdrew again into her solitude of the back room and sat there in a palpitating intentness.

"I don't know," Marshall was saying, obstinately. "I don't know whether it's confidential. It depends on the sort of thing you've got to say."

Porson stopped him by another of those rather uncertain gestures of the hands that, wavering as they were, certainly had the effect of power. He leaned forward in his chair now and let the dramatic hands drop between his knees, while he reflected.

"You—" he began slowly, "you've printed two numbers."

"Yes," said Marshall.

There was an ugly frown between his brows. Janie, seeing it spring there and knit itself, thrilled with admiration of him and eagerness of sympathy with what he would say. Porson would propose some unworthy pact, and her husband would repudiate it. She was glad to be before the stage of that fine drama.

Porson looked up at Marshall with one of his quick glances that, however much they shifted, seemed to gather whatever they needed in their course.

"How much you got in type now?" he asked.

Marshall laughed a little with that ironic note fitted to his scornful look.

"Mr. Porson," said he, "what have you come to ask?"

Porson straightened now and gazed at him. To Janie, from her oblique vantage ground, he looked like a shambling old man. Marshall, confronting the direct beam of the small eyes, found it a holding power.

"The question's here," said Porson. He opened his mouth slightly, tightened the skin of his cheek and rubbed it with a forefinger, a trick Marshall knew in sundry farmers of his acquaintance. He saw at once that it was a characteristic gesture, and put it down in his mental notebook. "I took up your two first numbers," said Porson, simply, "the first of the evening, and read 'em through. I thought I'd drop in before it went any further."

"Anything wrong with my facts?" asked Marshall incisively.

Porson seemed about to answer, but he drew himself back as if with a tardy recognition that this was a species of tribunal, and that he was not obliged to incriminate himself.

"Well," he said, with deliberation, "I don't know's I've got anything to say on that score. What I pitched upon——"

Marshall involuntarily glanced toward the inner room, and Janie, though she knew he could not see her, nodded at him in a community of delighted interest at Porson's way of expressing himself. They had both known he had a vocabulary of country phrases. He was confirming their cleverness with every word.

"What I pitched upon was this. You say towards the end of number two that later you'll go into particulars about the Blackstone Avenue land grab, and how Porson's head clerk got ahead of him for once. Now I take it you make quite a handle of that?"

Marshall nodded, watching him.

"I go into it rather fully," he said.

"What article's it come in?"

"Number four."

"Well, Mr. Bruce," said Porson, looking him in the face, "I want you to cut that out."

Marshall laughed. Janie knew what he thought he had discovered. She, too, had hit upon it. Old Porson must have a very human foible at the bottom of his bag of tricks. He was not only a money king, avid of accumulation and the spread of his base regnancy; he was vain. He could not endure to have the world told that any man had got ahead of him.

"I should be much obliged," he was continuing, "if you'd tell me how you went into that."

"Delighted," said Marshall, dryly. "I've got the article right here." He opened a drawer, and after a frowning search brought out several crumpled galleys of proof. These he whirled into order, and gave them to Porson, pointing out the significant paragraphs. Porson read slowly and painstakingly. Marshall, watching him, felt convinced that if these had been columns of figures, he could have run over them lightly with an accustomed ease; but even the plainest literature was dubitable ground.

"Yes," he said, at last. "Yes. I thought that's the way you'd fix it. Well, Mr. Bruce, you've got your facts pretty clear."

Marshall nodded.

"Yes," he echoed. "I've got my data. You see, Mr. Porson, men in your occupation keep leaving documentary evidence behind them. There aren't any suppositions in these articles of mine. They're columns of cold facts. You've furnished the incidents yourself. I've only trailed along after you and picked 'em up."

But Porson did not seem to hear. He was considering, thinking out the best move to make. Finally he nodded slightly, as if in confirmation to himself, and sat up.

"Well," said he, "I guess I'll have to tell you the story of that deal."

Marshall smiled a little. The amended story would mean that Porson was explaining himself. That was an immense triumph touching a man who, whatever the popular outcry, never answered. To explain meant to

excuse himself, in a way to beg for milder verdicts. If a man had wrought that upon old Porson, he had done well.

Porson was drumming noiselessly now upon the desk, keeping time as he talked, and Marshall watched the knotted fingers. Janie, out of her cage, never turned her eyes from the old man's face.

"You say he"—Porson touched the bundle of disordered proof lightly with a species of disparagement not superb enough for scorn—"you say here my clerk, Luther Tileston, got ahead of me. You say he found out before I did that Blackstone Avenue was going through the old Dumping Fields, and he cut in ahead of me and bought up that land. Well, Mr. Marshall, you're wrong. I bought that land."

"Oh, no, you didn't," said Marshall, his mind on the trapping of vanity. "The deeds stood in his name. He made a fortune. His wife and daughter are living on it to-day."

"Yes," said Porson, mildly, as if in tolerance of incomplete methods. "But I furnished the money. I bought in Tileston's name."

"What for?"

"It didn't do for me to go into it unless I did it some such way. I'd begun to be a marked man—" a slight assertiveness animated his voice. "If I'd gone into it in the light of day, there'd have been a hundred others ready to jump and pick up all the land near by. I wanted that, too, but I hadn't the means I have now. I wasn't prepared to take it till I knew whether they were going to extend the avenue to the river front and make the drive."

"The rest was sold later," said Marshall, vaguely. He was not yet sensitized. "You did buy that. But Tileston bought the first lot. He got the Dumping Fields."

"Don't I tell you I bought in his name?" inquired Porson.

"Well," said Marshall, unwillingly convinced, "so you want me to make the correction?"

"I want you to drop the whole matter."

"Why?"

There was a long pause, and Janie, watching, saw Porson's face concentrate as if he were travelling a difficult way, bordered by sadder or more serious things. Suddenly he came back.

"Tileston," said he, "was an honest man."

"Why, yes," Marshall returned, "nobody's ever known anything against Tileston. Except that land *coup*, of course. But I suppose he had a friend in the city council. I suppose he knew pretty well which way the boom was going, and it seemed to him venial to snap something up."

"He didn't have any friend in the city council," said Porson, patiently. "I had the friend—more than one of 'em. I sent Tileston abroad on business at the time of that deal. He knew no more about it than the dead. And a week after he got home he died himself."

"So, if you bought for him, as you say you did, he never knew it?"

"No." A curious expression came over Porson's face and crumpled it into another sort of document. It bespoke remembrance of the uphill paths he had

travelled to his gilded cell. "Tileston never knew anything about the matter. We had a kind of an unpleasantness at that time. He got hold of some things he didn't—understand." Janie, with a light vault into the saddle of intuition, thought he had been about to say, "stand for", and on that hint coursed along after him. "In regard to the business, that is. He meant to leave me. We talked that out a day or two before he died."

"What made you let the other matter rest? Wasn't it of a sort to be settled on the dot? You couldn't have meant to leave it that way, at loose ends. The avenue was voted on in less than a month."

Porson's mouth worked a little. "I did mean to clinch it," he said. "I put it off."

Instantly Janie felt she was running back over the difficult path, her mind with his, and she thought she saw exactly how it had been. Porson was younger then, less toughened to the world's assaults, and momentarily he had found himself unable to stand before the temperamental onslaught of Tileston's scorn. Marshall too, had his conclusions.

"He would have repudiated it?" he put in irresistibly.

Porson did not seem to hear.

"I'd only to tell him and the transfer would have been made," he averred. "Tileston was an honest man." And then, with no implication of the sequence, "He was no sort of a clerk for me. I shouldn't have taken him in the first place—but we were boys together."

"Then, when he died, the property stood in his name. You got left, so to speak."

"It stood in his name," said Porson, briefly.

"Mr. Porson," said Marshall, "I wish you'd let me use this as an interview. It's magnificent copy."

"No," said Porson, immovably, "I don't want you to use it and I don't want you to speak of the land. Tileston left a widow and a crippled daughter. That property appreciated."

"I should say it did!"

"They're living on it to-day. If they knew how it come—well, I don't feel sure what they'd do about it. I rather guess it wouldn't be safe."

"What makes you think so?"

"You see the widow come to me after Tileston's death. She was a kind of a high-spirited woman. Interested in charities. Wanted to reform the city government. Nice pleasant woman, too. Well, somebody'd got hold of her and told her Tileston was smart as a trap to fall in with the city government and pick up that land before the deal went through, and she come to me with tears in her eyes. Said her husband couldn't do a thing like that. If he could, she'd throw the money into the sea. Said she only hoped the firm had been doing it through him. Ready to sign it over to us. Seemed as if she couldn't do it soon enough."

"What did you say?" Marshall asked it breathlessly.

The ghost of a relaxation that might have served Porson for a smile, was wrinkling his lean face.

"I told her Tileston would have cut off his right hand before he'd have dickered with the city government."

"Did that convince her?"

"Oh, yes. She never liked me very well. Said she could trust me to tell her the worst, because if there was

a chance of the property's comin' to the firm she knew I'd be eager and ready. Oh, no! She never liked me."

"And you think if she knew now——"

"I've watched that woman a good many years. She ain't the kind of a woman you care so very much about—" he made that slight motion of his toward the darkness where Janie sat, and she at least knew, with a cognizance purely feminine, that he was remembering her as something to be valued— "but you'd know she'd shell out in a second if she thought the money didn't come the straight road."

"You think she'd do it now?"

"I know she would."

"And she and the crippled daughter——"

"They'd go to the wall."

The two men sat for a minute or two in silence, Porson not even beating his impatient fingers upon the table. Janie, hearing her own hurried heart, hardly dared watch them now. When her husband spoke, hot tears came into her eyes. The tone was the one of infinite softness he was accustomed to use for her only.

"Now, you see I've mentioned the deal already. I can't take that back. I've got to speak of it again. How would it do if I should refer to it as one of those curious strokes of chance by which an honest man, not especially fitted for business, should have picked up some land nobody wanted—picked it up at the crucial moment just as the tide turned its way?"

"That's it," said Porson, with an evident relief. "But this—" he pointed to the proof which he evidently regarded with the deference of unaccustomed eyes, "this is printed."

"It hasn't gone into the magazine. I can arrange that. I can elaborate the stock transaction toward the close and cut this for space."

Porson picked up the proof and began reading the concluding paragraphs. Janie slipped out into the kitchen and Marshall heard water running through the filter. He watched Porson now with a softened, even an eager, curiosity. What would it mean to the man to read the record of this other transaction, perhaps the most disgraceful, and yet legally the safest of his whole career. Porson laid the paper down, a veiled yet retrospective look upon his face.

"Have I—" Marshall hesitated— "Mr. Porson, do you challenge that?"

But Porson, taking his hat to go, looked merely inscrutable.

"I see you've put it in '71," he answered.

"Yes, April, '71. I believe that's the right date."

Janie was flying in to them with a tray, two glasses and a pitcher. Her eyes held points of light. She flushed all over her face, as if at some extraordinary event.

"I made you some lemonade, Mr. Porson," she said. "Won't you try it, please?"

The request was even urgent, as if Porson could do her the most distinct favor. He accepted a glass gravely, and drank without pause. Marshall, tasting, stopped and threw Janie a whimsical, terrified look, because she had left out the ice. Then he remembered that a part of their personal data was to the effect that Porson's elected beverage was unchilled lemon-

ade, and smiled over the drink at Janie, who had scored.

Porson set down his glass.

"I'll bid you good evening," he said. He was going out, veiled again in his poor inscrutability. But Janie dashed at him, in a warm impulsive hurry.

"Good-by, Mr. Porson," she said. "Won't you shake hands?"

He looked briefly surprised; the gnarled old hand enveloped hers, and again he said good-night. They heard the shambling, undignified tread lessening down the stairs. Then they looked at each other. There were tears in Janie's eyes, and Marshall frankly swore.

"He's made it over," she said, tumultuously, "the world I saw to-night. It was dark with evil, and Porson's hung a light in it."

Marshall was looking toward the door, closed upon the meagre figure. His hand lay upon the proofs where he had put all that his clever mind had been able to gather concerning another man.

"So that," he said, in a curious tone, "is Porson. That's the man himself."

THE PRIVATE SOLDIER

ONSLOW PERRY sat in the dusty, booklined office of the *Flywheel* Publishing Company, his hand half-concealingly, half-protectingly on a letter he had just finished, and looked across the table at the soft-coal fire burning in the rusted grate. The *Flywheel* had selected an old house, falling into decay, in a quarter of the town forsaken by the sort of residents that had built it up grandly more than a hundred and fifty years ago. The mantels were so good, both sponsors of the *Flywheel* said gravely when they were chaffed about gravitating to the slums. So they put the house into fitting repair, and ceased to take any after-notice of it so far as dust and cobwebs went; they affected the attitude of leaving it to itself, to grow ancient again. There Dickerman, the editor and publisher, and Perry, his subordinate, received manuscript and made up the magazine. They had swallowed the house whole, it was said, for they also lived there and skirmished about, from inconsiderable eating-houses on their lean days to gilded cafés when their pockets ran over.

It was matter for amazement in a time when new magazines spring up and flourish briefly, that the *Flywheel* in particular should have sold; but even at first it did, and the wise declared they knew the reason. Dickerman was buying the most expensive and splendid

contributors with his father's money, though he had the whim of making them publish anonymously. Dickerman himself, known in college as Crazy Ike, Dotty Dick, and half a dozen titles to the same shading and effect could scarcely contain himself when the circulation ran unhaltingly up. It was, he felt, a personal tribute. He had planned the whole thing, and it was true that he had put his father's money into it, after coaxings colored by sanguine prophecies absurdly contrasted with his resultant surprise at their fulfillment. But there, at a good figure, the circulation hung. It could not be whipped or spurred, nor did it drop very startlingly below that first buoyant figure.

Dickerman was a favorite among his mates, and he had an enormous acquaintance. Perry, too, owned a vogue of another sort. Men who were not of their own kind, brokers, grave professional workers, or gamblers on the scent of money, having met the two at clubs and laughed at their stories, their wild play of imagination, and antiphonal abuse of each other, cherished a lively curiosity to see what they would say when they really had a medium like the *Flywheel*. The two men together were possessed of a trick of augmenting each other, to the general mirth; and the absent, who happened not to be creditors, always thought of them to the accompaniment of a smile.

Perry, who sat at the table, arms relaxed and face wistfully puckered, hardly looked like a ministrant to gayety. He was sinewy, and light of hair and eyes, six feet tall, with good broad shoulders and a swing and dash that made the ladies look at him demurely. His thick hair tumbled over his forehead in a blowzy way,

because he rumpled it when the world went ill. To the casual eye, he was a handsome, virile animal, with no lines permanent enough as yet to tell careless tales. The time would come when, unless he hardened his face by the repeated hammer-strokes that mould and change, some one would see a blenching of the eye, when his more decided intimates called upon him to do or leave undone,—a sensitive quiver of the mouth.

The door from the inner office opened, and Dickerman came in. He was shortlegged, and cushiony in the shoulders, absurdly fat, with round eyes staring behind large horn-bowed spectacles. His hair stood straight up from his forehead in bristles aggressively cultivated. The frown also was a part of his equipment, lest the world should misprize him for the plumpness thrust upon him. He threw a manuscript on the table.

"Read that," said he.

"When I have time," Perry answered, as if he did not propose to use the time he had, at call.

"You've got time now. It's only four thousand words. Want to talk to you about it."

Perry only leaned back in his chair, and gazed thoughtfully at Dickerman, who, knowing this mood in him, affected not to recognize it, and sought about among the effects on the table, whistling cheerily. But he was of the nature that, having something to say, cannot defer it.

"I'm going to just electrify you, Perry," he burst forth. "They're on to us."

"Who are?"

"Everybody. They will be by day after to-morrow. I met Hunkins on the ferry, and he couldn't contain

himself. Said he'd discovered how we made the *Flywheel* so distinctive. Said he found five or six old numbers on the hotel table where he'd been to interview the mill-hands. Said he read 'em consecutively. Said he guessed the whole thing."

Perry was looking at him with a gravity that seemed to indicate an issue very bad indeed.

"What did you say?" he inquired.

"Asked him what he meant."

"Well?"

"Said he wouldn't tell. We could buy the Wednesday's *Trumpet* and find out."

"He has a weekly column."

"Yes. And when he'd said that, he just couldn't hold in, and came back and sputtered and laughed the way he does, and said he was going to write the history of the magazine and name it the *Echo*. Then he called me a clever fellow."

"What did you call him?"

"An ass. Because that was the answer to it."

"Well," said Perry. He took up a pencil and began drawing whorls and circles with a clever hand. He had a certain facility in everything. At one time, when he was an intimate of an artistic set in college, there had been an impression that he was going to work miracles as a draughtsman of some sort.

Dickie began to grin. He had a wide mouth and beautiful teeth.

"I almost told him how I did it," he said, with a chuckling appreciation of his own folly.

"Told him how you invented the *Flywheel?*"

"Yes. It tickled me so I thought I'd have to."

"Fool," said Perry, indulgently.

"I saw myself lying there—I was in bed, you know—and thinking how it's only discovery that counts. After anybody's found a new way of doing something or other, there'll be plenty of fellows that can do the trick as well as he can, or better. But he caught it while it was rushing by, and labeled it, and it stands in the museum in his name."

"Yes, I know all that. You said that when you came to rope me in. You reeled it off, and I knew it was a monologue you'd got up for the boys; and then you sprung it on me that you were going to start a magazine."

"With anonymous contributions."

"Which I was to write."

"Because you could write 'em. If I could have done it, do you s'pose I'd have summoned anybody else from the vasty deep?"

"Never mind whether you would or wouldn't. Anyhow, I've done it. I've ground you out an imitation of Kipling and an imitation of Shaw, and all the whole blooming push, and when you've given 'em a good plausible title and put 'em in without a name, blessed if the wise can tell whether it isn't Kipling and Shaw."

"No, they can't. But here's that prattler's article coming out, and it gives the whole thing away. I do hate an incontinent blabber. If a fellow's got something to say, why can't he keep his mouth shut?"

That sounded to them both like the verbal tricks they used to delight the groundlings, and it made them melancholy. Perry often declared that nothing so

blighted them as the particular character of each other's babble.

"It might boom the *Flywheel*," he said, after a time.

"Why, it's putting a knife into it! Poor little *Flywheel*. Poor 'itty sing."

"You can't tell. When it comes to advertising, attack's as good as reinforcement. As a matter of fact, you really never can tell."

Dickerman stretched out his short legs and regarded them with disfavor. After a period of incubation, he glanced up brightly.

"You know my system," he said.

Perry spoke brutally, out of the affectionate derision that counts itself exempt from casuistry. "You haven't any system except the one you're riddling with highballs and cigarettes."

"What do you mean by saying I've got no system? I live by the inner light."

"Inner grandmother!"

"No, inner light. I'm a very intuitive person. I take up the morning paper. I turn to the market. If my inner light sends a long shaft of radiance, 'mystic, wonderful', to any particular name, I buy that stock."

"You never made enough in stocks in the whole course of your life to buy your shoe-strings with, and have 'em charged."

"What's that got to do with it? The inner light goes on shining just the same. It's like the death of Paul Dombey. 'The light is shining on me as I go.' Well, it's shining on me now."

"Oh, you 'go' fast enough," commented Perry,

gloomily. "The bait isn't dug that you wouldn't nibble at."

"Now here we come to the *Flywheel.* When Hunkins told me he proposed showing up our methods, the inner light just coruscated, and I saw with my subconscious vision, 'Change your methods.' That's what we're going to do, my boy. We're going to change our methods."

"Then it happens at the right time," said Perry quickly, as if he found himself lacking in impetus to speak at all.

"'Psychological moment!' Have we got that on the *Flywheel's* taboo list? I must put down 'anent' and 'Frankenstein'. I thought of them this morning."

"It happens just right for me," Perry continued, "because you won't need me."

"Need you! Great Cæsar! you're the jelly in the tart. You're *it!*"

Perry played with his pencil, using it, by adroit touches, to thrust the stamped letter before him into a series of quick changes of place, as if it were a game. He glanced up from moment to moment, in a desultory way, to watch his friend.

"I've had an offer, Dickie," he said, "to go on the *Civilian* at fifteen per."

"Shameful! you sha'n't!"

Perry did not fight out that purely financial issue.

"I've written them I'd go," he said. "The letter's here."

Dickie made a dive for it, but Perry, by a ready counter-movement, as if this also were the game, caught it up and dropped it into a drawer.

"Don't you mail that letter," Dickie blustered.

"Maybe I shan't. Honest, I don't know whether I shall or not. But it's written. I thought I'd like to see how it would sound."

Dickerman was staring at him with eyes ridiculously distended. He was white with surprised apprehension, white in patches that, beside the adjacent pink of his skin, had a droll distinctness.

"I never heard of such a thing," he declared. "Never! You know you can do what no other fellow can, and you propose to lock up your capital, refuse to let it earn anything for you, and go out hod-carrying for so much a day."

Perry was returning his gaze with the rather appealing smile that made him younger than his years, the air of the boy that asks sweetly, unassumingly, for something he might easily be denied.

"The fact is, Dick, it's awfully bad for me to do your kind of thing. You see, it's a sort of high-class forgery."

"Bad for you? What do you mean? Bad for your brains, or your pocket, or what?"

Now Perry looked absurdly conscious. His shamefaced mien said that he might be about to say something which could be used as a perennial text for jeering.

"It resolves itself," he deprecated, "into that question of the inner light."

But although Dickerman had himself introduced the inner light as a factor of illumination, somehow it became immediately different when Perry turned it on. It had ceased to disclose the merely humorous. It laid bare, with a most embarrassing distinctness, that earnest which is likely to be comedy's next neighbor. He shook his head.

"I haven't the least idea what you're driving at," he averred.

"No," said Perry. "I know you haven't. Did it ever occur to you that I'm a queer sort of chap?"

"You're as clever as they make 'em," Dickie flashed back, as if he were bidding for him.

"That's it. But it isn't my cleverness. It's the cleverness of the other man, the one that makes me talk, or write,—the author of the book I imitate. I'm a kind of a mirror. You hold up things to me and I reflect 'em." His face betrayed a keen mortification, the flush and quiver that might have sprung from some definite slight or indignity of the moment.

Dickie saw no way of following him, and frankly abjured the trouble of attempting it.

"Oh, pshaw!" said he. "You're dotty. Come back! The *Flywheel's* got to be adjusted. I told you I meant to change the system. I'm going to have some clever original work. What we want is to discover somebody."

"Count me out. You can't discover me."

Dickie pointed dramatically at the manuscript he had brought in with him.

"He's discovered," he remarked, with oracular certainty. "Behold!"

Perry stretched out his hand.

"Give it here," he bade him. "Let me see."

He took the paper and read it fast, frowning over it, and once he broke out:

"Good! oh, good!"

Dickie, nodding from time to time as he saw recognition of this or that distinction he remembered, smiled triumphantly. Perry turned back to the beginning

and ran swiftly over it again. Then he slapped it down on the table and left it there, regarding it with a mixture of affection and abusive rallying, as one might a newly discovered and most bewildering person who is really so consummate that the finder shrinks from disclosing the full measure of his own extravagant approval.

"And the whole thing has been waiting round the corner ever since New York has had a foreign population," he said, in wonder. "One man does the Ghetto and another Little Italy, and just these people in here have been toting their bundles and marrying and burying, and nobody's photographed them. We're as dense as our cloud-capp'd granite hills."

"Well, we needn't be dense any longer," said Dickie. His eyes had that peculiar gleam that gathered when he came in after a particularly good night's sleep and declared the world looked so bright to him, and he found morning was so exactly at seven, that he'd bought five hundred shares of some stock with a picturesque name, because the sound of it invited him. "I want a series—six stories like that."

"Well, you've got the first. Going to order five others?"

"I'm going to order six others—of you."

"Me? What have I got to do with it?"

"My boy, you're the great and only imitator. You've read one story and you've seen how the trick was done. I'll bet a shoe-button you could tell me on the dot the names of the others that jumped into your brain since you read this."

Perry stirred uncomfortably in his chair.

"What's the use of talking like that?" he inquired, testily. "You don't know what's in my brain, nor whether I've got a brain at all."

"Three thousand for six," Dickie was bidding. The color, a girlish rose flush, had overspread his cheeks. His eyes gained in light until they glittered with the gambling zest. "Daddy'll stand for it. He made golcondas in sugar last week. Three thousand! You can go abroad and tell Chesterton he's a paradox. You can go to China and drop a tear on the grave of Tsi-hsi. What do you say?"

The enemy within was beguiling Perry more insidiously than the persuader without. The six stories with the same complexion, every intimate touch to the life like this, were lined up beckoning to him. He put out his hand rather uncertainly toward the manuscript. He hated to dismiss them into oblivion, pretty, ingenuous, unborn children. His vague seeking for control and guidance was only stronger than his lack of personal initiative. Give him the right sort of captain, he had always known, and he could have made a faithful soldier.

"How about this girl?" he asked.

"Girl? That isn't a girl. It's a middle-aged man, knocked into shape by all the devilish things we know—competition and work and worry. Don't you see how middle-aged it is?"

"Don't you see how ideal it is?" Perry did lay his hand on the paper now, almost caressingly.

"I rather guess you can recall your ideals when you're middle-aged. They loom, too, you're so far in the ditch below them. Oh, no, Perry, no! This is mellow.

There's practice in it, disappointment. Nobody under thirty ever said a thing like that." He drew the manuscript from Perry's unwilling fingers and whirled the pages to a halt. "Read that."

Perry evidently did not propose recurring to it. The impression made on him at the start needed no augmenting.

"What are you going to do with it?" he asked.

"Return it," Dickie responded, in a tone as conclusive as the words.

"Pick her brains of their secret and then chuck the shell of it back to her? Talk about the inner light! Dick, you're defeated. You're killed, but you don't know it."

"Fiddlededum!" said Dickerman, looking at his watch. "I've got to be up town in less time than I can get there. You must see the author. He's coming in this morning for his manuscript."

"This author? This manuscript?"

"Yes, he wrote he'd call. I fancied he had to consider the difference between one stamp or two, poor beggar! I depute to you the task of telling him we don't want the manuscript, and offering him a cigar. You'll see for yourself he's a man of forty."

Dickie was out of his chair, giving a characteristic hunch to his clothes, to adapt them the more graciously to his hateful chubbiness. Perry looked his helpless discomfort over the job thrust upon him, and asked rather bitterly,—

"Shall I tell her you are returning the manuscript because I can write you six of the same pattern, now I've learned the way?"

"Tell him I refuse it, that's all. I do, lock, stock, and barrel, prologue and epilogue. I don't want it. No printee. Finis."

"Why not ask her to write you five more like it?"

"Because I don't want her to. Because"—he halted at the door and diffused the sunniest smile—"because you'll do the same thing better. You always improve on your pattern. That's why you're the man to do it. 'We needs must love the highest,' mustn't we? I rather guess we must. If you can do a better job than this codger that's happened to stumble on a gold mine, aren't you the chap to do it? Bet you'll have three of 'em written before to-morrow morning. And—don't you mail that letter."

He whistled cheerily down the stairs, and Perry condemned him picturesquely. He pounced on a big envelope, as if it could help him, and dipped his pen. The story should be mailed to the author whose literary domain was threatened with invasion. It should be out of the office on the instant, so that it could tempt him no more with its beguiling limpidity, its human warmth, the perfection of form that might well be the despair of even a master imitator.

But when he returned to the manuscript for the address, he had the setback of finding none. Then he pushed it away from him, and, because his angry impulse had spent itself and he lacked even the spirit to go into the inner room to find a record of the story, he lay back in his chair with one idle hand hanging over the arm, and tried to fight down the certainty that this was destiny and that he was about to do the job of his nefarious imitating. Pen and ink seemed calling him

with the force of a spell. Arguments began to chase through his mind, not for earning the money, but for proving to himself that he could do work as good as this, and better. He went back over the genesis of literature and reminded himself that one man could hardly do whatever he did save in the light cast over his shoulder by the other man who had gone before. Who except the scholar, reading certain verse, remembered who first made that metre his own and sealed it, as he had thought, with a golden seal of his recognized distinction? One man had opened the orient to western eyes by the talisman of his quick sight and hurrying pen, and the west had rushed into what had looked at first like preëmpted ground, and staked out splendid claims.

First, there is the discoverer. Then, when the trees are blazed by the pioneer axe, paths have to be made to river and spring. He remembered a poem that told, with a dignified but hurt emphasis, this same tale of the pioneer's sharing his discovery with after-invaders deputed, by the unvarying law of leveling, to develop the land. Once, in the midst of this inner colloquy, he paused, with a whimsical flirt of the mind, to wonder whether Dickerman, on his way up town, was sending these arguments back to him by wireless; it was a part of his morbid self-consciousness, at this time, to regard Dickie, when he was not in the room offering his pinkiness and gayety for testimony to the wholesomeness of things, as mysteriously equipped with necromantic powers.

Now, he felt, his mind was almost reconciled to the feat of leaping into the field and sowing magic seed of

the plant that comes up in an hour, where the other mind had ploughed and furrowed and raised the stock that bore the bright new bloom: almost reconciled, but not quite. There was something within him, an unnamed personality, something more august than any mind, and either royal or timid, because it walked always veiled. On this inner person he was now laying a mandatory and beseeching finger, bidding it come out into the daylight and tell what it really had to say, when the door opened and the girl stepped in. That was what he called her at once, because he had prophesied her in relation to the story—the girl. She was dark and slender, very neat and yet not at first sight significant, because she looked like many other women dressed trigly for their work. But Perry, as he got out of his chair, noted distinctive things about her: a pallor that was yet wholesome, dark shining hair, and sincere gray eyes under a lovely line of brow. She was not timid, he saw, for she advanced to his table at once, and said,—

"My name is Hartwell. I came to ask about a manuscript I sent in."

"G. Hartwell?" he inquired. He went round the table, and pulled out Dickie's chair. "Won't you sit down, Miss Hartwell? I have the manuscript here."

She took the chair with a quiet acceptance of its being the thing to do; but her eye did light when it followed his to the little pile of paper there on the table.

"I hope," she began, and then dropped into a form of speech that should make it easier for him: "I'm afraid you're not going to take it."

"Have you been writing long?"

He had gone back to his seat, and now reproved himself for the futility of his beginning when it was so evident that she was too young to have been doing anything long.

"I don't write. I teach school. But I want to leave it, and do writing altogether."

"Journalism, or—this?" He touched the manuscript again with a kind of approving intimacy.

"I've already done some journalism, book-notices and reading manuscript. But this," her eyes, too, sought the story, "this is what I really want to do."

At once he saw that it stood for exactly what it did in his own longings,—one of the free, splendid masteries, a craft to be studied with devotion for a lifetime perhaps, if only one could say at the close, "I have served one thing well." He wanted to have his brutal task over as soon as possible.

"He's not going to take it," he threw at her.

A look of almost terrified surprise shot into her face, to be quelled as swiftly under a patience that looked as if it had been learned through much rebuff.

"Then you're not Mr. Dickerman?" she asked.

"No." He sacrificed Dickie without an instant's scruple. "He doesn't think he can use it. He believes he may have more of the same kind."

She made a movement to take the story, but he closed his hand upon it. Thereupon she waited for anything further he might have to say. His inexplicable mortification impressed itself upon her then, and she tried to help him.

"I can't wonder," she said. "It's presumption in me to jump into a pool where there are such big fish.

Of course nobody'd see me. The other tails and fins are flashing so!" Her big, sweet mouth broadened into a smile. "No magazine has such a list of contributors as yours. And they do their best work for you. You must offer them big bribes, to publish such good stuff anonymously."

Perry felt his face crimsoning with pleasure. He could hardly help rising to make her a bow, and murmur his delighted appreciation.

"You like it then?" he speciously inquired. "You like the *Flywheel?*"

She answered without an instant's pause.

"Oh, it's superb! But I can't help thinking—you'll pardon me, won't you?—it's a mistake to keep the contributors anonymous. Folks are so stupid, most of them. They don't recognize the master hand unless it signs its name. Some of us do, and it makes us fearfully conceited. But you can't build up a circulation out of the elect, now can you? There aren't enough of us."

Then she laughed unaffectedly over her cockiness, and he joined her, taking up the current number of the *Flywheel,* and asking, with a shamefacedness she could not penetrate,—

"Run over the contents, will you, and name the contributors?"

She did it without reflection. There were a dozen names, four of them as significant as the modern list affords, and the others of the well-known best in an inferior circle. As she ran them rapidly through, Perry felt himself tingling with the pleasure of it. This he had done; if he could not create, he could at least dupli-

cate the best makers so that fine eyes and fine ears could hardly tell the difference, which might, after all, be sometimes in his favor.

"Thank you," he said soberly at the end, but she could not know exactly what his gratitude was for. Suddenly he found he was throwing prudence and a dozen lesser bits of ballast overboard, and admitting her to the inside of his mind where he conceived and plotted. "See here," he said, "do you want me to tell you what I should do with this story?" His hand had not left her manuscript. Now it beat upon it with an indicating finger.

She nodded.

"I should give it to the *Councillor*."

"The *Councillor!* I shouldn't dare. It isn't for the likes of me."

"The *Councillor* will jump at it."

"But you didn't jump."

He temporized. "It's a bully story," he said. "There's been nothing like it in a year's issue of all the magazines, the whole posse of them."

"But there's an out about it or you'd take it yourself."

"I don't say there isn't—for the *Flywheel*. But you try the *Councillor*. And—" he looked her straight in the eye, to make her, if he could, share his conviction—"and not alone. With five others like it."

"A series?"

"Yes. The minute I'd read this I saw what they could be. Don't you see, you could take the sixteen-year old girl and put her into the shop, to substitute for her sister, so the sister can make her wedding-clothes.

The family need never know who it was the sister was engaged to, but when Rosa gets into the shop she finds it's that frightful Lecorescor—"

One by one they went over them, from the grandfather to the child, and stabbed the tragedy of each. Now the girl talked faster than he. Color came into her face; she flashed and charmed unconsciously.

"Of course I can," she kept saying. "Of course! Why, it's the story of the family. This little sketch only begins it. How stupid I was!"

Then only did he give her back her manuscript.

"Got any more in your head?" he asked, with a misleading lightness. It covered an almost fatherly anxiety. He wanted her to succeed. It seemed worth any sacrifice.

She laughed back at him out of that new brilliancy.

"Lots!" she said almost defiantly, as if she challenged him to dispute it. "If I could only get time, I should glut the market. The supervisors keep us frightfully busy doing fool things. But—" she lifted her head to its little willful pose—"I shall get time. I'm determined."

Perry was looking at her narrowly, partly because it was evident that she would soon go and it seemed desirable to learn her face by heart, and also to come to some understanding of a will so secure that it predicted what must be.

"Do you always do what you determine on?" he asked, so seriously that she answered, not out of her whimsical mood of the previous moment, but with a soft earnestness,—

"I try to, when it's right."

Then, as his face continued to interrogate her with its painful appeal, she saw that more was required of her. "We must," she ventured, from the shyness of the unaccustomed preacher. "We must, mustn't we?"

"Must what?"

"We must determine on things and then just do them."

He stared down at his hand playing with the paper-cutter, and did not look up even though he knew, by the little preparatory rustle, that in an instant she would go.

"Sit still," he said. "I want to ask you something."

So she kept her seat and was very quiet, watching his face grow graver than the moment seemed to warrant.

"It's about a story," he began. "I want you to tell me what you think could be done with it."

"You want me to do it?" she asked alertly.

"I don't know. Maybe I do. Maybe I want you to collaborate. I fancy I've got to have a hand in it myself. We might call it 'The Mirror', or something of that sort. It's the story of a man who found he could only reflect things. He couldn't give out any light of his own. Understand?"

"No," she answered frankly.

"Well, to illustrate, here are you, writing stories. You think of 'em—"

"They come to me."

"It's all one. But so far as you know, the story springs, in the form you finally use, from your own brain. Of course you're indebted to previous observation, a million hints from without. But you take those

million hints and fuse and color and shape in your own private workshop—your brain. That's what you do, or think you do: for after all none of us knows really much about it."

"That's what I think I do."

"Now take another kind of brain, the brain of the man we spoke of. That's a workshop too, but it's different. The tools are about the same, for he turns out the brand of article you do; but the beginning, the inception, is different. You work—or you think you work—without a pattern."

She had fallen in with the fancy.

"I make my own pattern," she said quickly. "But I do it only because I've seen so many thousand patterns cut by master workmen before me. Still I think my pattern is my own."

"Exactly! but the man we're dealing with can't make his pattern. He can only work after somebody has given him a model. He can do it then, stunning stuff, you know, but it's never anything but a copy. It's the difference between Cellini and a clever silversmith who is merely clever. You take him a vase of Cellini and he can copy it exquisitely, but he couldn't have designed it."

"Isn't that the difference between an artisan and an artist?"

"I fancy so. Well, now, an artisan may be honest, usually is. But if he stole patterns whenever he got a chance, and said, 'They're mine. They're the real thing,' he wouldn't be honest, now, would he?"

"Oh, no. He'd be a scamp."

"He might do it at first as a kind of joke, and be-

cause he was really rather vain and it tickled him to see he could do the trick as well as anybody, only show him how. But one day it might occur to him that he was too much of a copyist. It had ceased to be a question of filling orders in the intellectual workshop. It was everything now."

"It had gone into his life."

"Yes; he was getting to be obedient to the chaps that were stronger than he. I don't know that they're stronger. Only they have such an infernal way of seeming original and bossing from that side of things. And he's made only to reflect, and he can't help reflecting. What's he going to do?"

He looked up at her now, and found she was resting both elbows on the table and had propped her chin on her hands, in the attitude of deep deliberation. She did not answer him with a glance. The hypothetical man evidently seemed of enormous importance to her, sufficient to demand the most earnest thought; but her air also said that she found no definite personal issue in the case.

"He was meant to be a private soldier," she half-declared, half-inquired for confirmation.

"It would seem so."

"Nothing but his own will would make him a leader?"

"I doubt if his will could do it. I told you he wasn't altogether weak,—at least, he doesn't seem so to me,—but he's no initiative. He's simply got to copy, in his work, and, I almost think, he's got to obey in his life. Now what's going to prevent him from sagging more and more, leaning on other wills, coming at call, even doing the things he knows ought not to be done? There's

a kind of a dry rot in it. That's what I'm asking you to save him from."

She took her elbows off the table and sat up straight, looking at him now as he looked at her. Their eyes met, and each recognized the spirit behind the darkening pupils.

"He mustn't do the things that ought not to be done," she said, concisely. "He simply mustn't."

"But he's a private soldier. We began with that."

"He mustn't serve under any captain that isn't—oh, isn't perfectly splendid! He mustn't fight in any cause that isn't just."

"Then it's the question of the captain?"

"Yes. At first, until he's trained and trained, and fought and fought, until he's got his will tempered—oh, well, then, you know, I think he'd be promoted."

"You do?"

She nodded. The laughter ran into his face, and hers answered it.

"Do you know," he said, confidentially, "I'm not sure he'd want to be promoted. I think it would scare him."

"It's my opinion half of them are scared," she answered,—"the leaders. That's why they are so big. They're brave enough to fight the foe within at the same time they're fighting the one without."

She had risen now, and he did not try to keep her.

"I wonder," he was musing, "whether it is a question of captains! Strong-willed—" He looked at her as if he inventoried her qualities, and she gazed innocently back at him, waiting to say good-by. "Strong-willed, sound-hearted, kind—and beautiful."

Then he seemed impatiently to put that by, as if he were talking foolishness she could not yet be trusted with. He came back to his every-day look of accessible, charming good humor.

"Would you mind," he asked, in an off-hand fashion, "leaving me your address? I have an idea I shall want to see you again about this—or something."

She wrote the address in a firm hand, putting the sheet of yellow paper he gave her flat against the wall.

"Thank you," he said, and she responded, at the door, with a kind little smile and a good-by. She was over the sill, when he bent quickly, opened the drawer, and took out the letter he had tossed there an hour ago. He strode after her, holding it outstretched.

"Would you mind," he asked, in a laughing earnest, "would you mind mailing this?"

She took it with no appearance of surprise.

"Delighted," she said. "Good-by again."

He was at the head of the stairs looking down at her nodding plume.

"I had a fancy," he called, in an exhilaration she did not understand, "to have you mail it. It's for luck."

THE CLUE

THE one detective story I have seen worked out through the inevitable lines converging to disclosure had forced itself on Ralph Masterman and me, and the end touched us vitally, as it did its principals. At least it opened our eyes to some of the causes of things, strained our skulls to the point of dangerously cracking the sutures, and probably induced a multiplicity of convolutions in the sensitive matter inside.

We had come home from exploring in Peru, our minds full of mountain chains and lakes and tamed volcanoes, and we unreasonably hoped—or said we did—that now we were going to settle down, perhaps to journalism. But great winds were blowing through our memories, big challenges to dominate the earth and open up more of her hidden passes, so that when our names were heard, in fifty years or so, men would say: "They? Oh, they did the last exploring left to do. Yes, they wrote *finis* on the geographical earth, and shut the book." Still the aunts—each of us possessed a fostering, doting aunt—thought we were going to stay at home.

It was the first day of our return when we were confronted with our riddle. The town itself, a topping suburb thinking no end of itself and refusing to be annexed, we found unchanged. Citizens, men and

women, were still telephoning one another about the advisability of a pleasure drive along the lake, the only stone of stumbling being the name. Should it be Elm Road or Laurel Drive? They were still acutely anxious over the dark doings of milkmen, and the consequent jeopardy of babies, and they almost prayed for parasites to feed on forest pests. It was all a kind of beloved, exasperating heaven on earth to us, who had now known the winds in their birthplace, and entered into the secret places of the snow. But one thing had lamentably changed. Rose Red was married. That we knew, for the imminence of it had been one among the determining whips of fate to start us off to Peru, two men children afire with youth, and vibrating the chords of hearts denied. She was married to a man overweeningly rich, and of no occupation but to look "stunning", and she was not happy. We came home from that first "evening" given in our honor, an evening marked by the sponge lady-fingers we knew and the old conscientious fruit punch, and mounted, with one mind, to the loft, that had served as our youthful playground and tophet of confusion. There we lighted up and smoked madly in silence. Then:

"She's not Rose Red any more," said Ralph, jerking out the words as if somehow I had done it all, and he were angry.

"No," said I. "She's Snow White. She's not happy."

"She never knew a day's unhappiness. He's brought it on her somehow."

"Oh, yes. He's brought it on her."

"Well," said Masterman, fractiously, throwing the

ball to me as he always did when there was a doubt of the game, "are you going to do anything about it?"

That was the way he had snapped at me when I gave out at twenty-three thousand feet altitude, and he was in mortal fear lest he shouldn't get me down. It had nearly done for me that time, because I wasted breath in a thin hoot of a laugh, and I had no breath to spare. But to-day I didn't feel like laughing.

"He's a good-looking chap," I meditated.

"Six foot one," said Masterman, in bitter disparagement. Masterman is stocky, and not over five feet eleven, a Norse giant of a hero.

"I mean he's got no tricks. He looks you in the eye. He takes his fruit punch like a man, and not as if he couldn't wait for the whiskey at home on the sideboard. Look as if the whiskey wouldn't phase him, either."

"Oh, no, he ain't a soaker, if that's what you mean. He's all right, very fit, clean, fond enough of his tailor, not too fond. No, whatever's wrong, his shop ain't going to hang out a sign. We've got to go in and examine the goods."

"We've no license," said I, ruefully.

"What?"

"Rose Red didn't marry us—individually or collectively."

"No," said Masterman, setting his mouth in its implication of bedrock. "But I don't see Rose Red fade out to Snow White without knowing the reason why. And if I find out the reason why, and any man's guilty—" Here he paused, and we smoked on.

The houses our aunts had inherited were side by side,

with a little gate in the garden fence between, so that Masterman and I practically lived together as we always had. The aunts, each in a morning muslin or an afternoon silk, made according to an extinct ideal, sat each on her own veranda and knitted rhythmically and widened aristocratic old nostrils to the honeysuckles. We had lost no time in pumping these ladies about the standing and habits of the husband of that dear perfection known once in the loft as Rose Red.

"What's the fellow's name?" I inquired over my third egg, while Aunt Celesta beamed at me, a light blue beam out of faded eyes behind a rim of gold, "the one Rose married?"

"Why, you met him last night," said Aunt Celesta, pained at somebody's lack of observance in not having made the presentation clear. "Weren't you introduced?"

"I dare say," said I, seeing I might have jumped more dexterously into the heart of the puzzle. "Hamlin, isn't it? Good fellow?"

"Admirable," said Aunt Celesta, warmly. She was now rescuing a fly from the cream jug, and I read in her face the conflict between ruth over insect life untimely ended, horrified estimate of the fly's culpability, based on the propaganda of modern theories touching disease, disgust at her task, and the query of her fighting soul whether she must really sacrifice the cream, though the kitchen supply wasn't at its maximum. She had very little testimony to contribute.

"Yes, a nice young man," she said, raising the screen and conveying the fly into a wider world to dry his wings. "Very nice, indeed."

Of her last scruple I relieved her, pouring myself cream with a dashing hand, and offering her the cup to fill.

"He's got money, hasn't he?" I plunged.

"Oh, yes," said Aunt Celesta. "They're rich, really. Quite the wealthiest people in town."

"Live well?"

That question, Aunt Celesta, I could see, considered coarse. She answered rather stiffly and to no purpose, and I drank the coffee I didn't want and went through the little gate to find Ralph. He was coming toward the little gate to meet me, and as by one consent Aunt Clara and Aunt Celesta pottered out on their verandas, exchanged a beaming smile indicating their community of blessedness in the possession of nephews, and settled to the forenoon's task of keeping moderately alive.

"I can't find out a damned thing," said Masterman, incautiously.

At the qualifying word each aunt jerked her head galvanically, but settled it again, knowing she could not, as the older novelists had it, have heard aright.

"There's nothing to find out" said I, drearily. "What do you suppose two aunts"—we always spoke of them generically as if the relationship made a type—"what would they know of a chap of thirty-three that walked right, and talked right, and dressed right? Nothing, old man, and you know it."

Masterman hit my foot with his.

"There he is," said he. "There's the fellow now."

It was Frederick Hamlin, and he was coming in at

Aunt Clara's gate. He looked very well in the morning light, slightly older, rather faded about the eyes, and he walked in haste, as if he came for an end. We turned with an absurd eagerness considering the slightness of our acquaintance, and met him midway of the yard. Masterman almost stammered in his desire to shunt him away from the aunts and get him to ourselves.

"Come on up in the loft," said he, with what seemed an exaggerated cordiality. "Unless you were coming to call."

"No," said Hamlin, in his rather grave voice. He stopped half-way up the path and adjusted his eyeglasses. That led my eyes to his, and I saw what I had not the night before, in our stiff encounter, that they looked very tired, slightly apprehensive and that there were wrinkles about them not accordant with his comparative youth. "No," he repeated, lifting his hat to one aunt and making a comprehensive bow to both. "I came to see you two."

So we went up, by its crazy outside stairs, to the loft. He looked about him curiously while Masterman cleared a seat; he seemed pleased to find himself there. Nothing could adequately describe the loft, even an inventory. You'd have gone daft over the collection of things, the chronological sequence of them, from tops and Happy Jacks and fairy books to the electrical apparatus of our college days, and the textbooks of no use to us now, though we were grateful to them: for on them we had built our degrees.

"I didn't know there was such a place in town," said Hamlin.

"There isn't another," said Masterman. "This grew. We couldn't make it. Nobody could."

He had got out tobacco, and Hamlin accepted with an air of not caring very much whether he had it or not. We smoked, and Masterman deliberately began trying to turn him inside out. He asked him questions even: what did he think of this, of that, current topics all; and I could see he meant to get at the back of Hamlin's mind, to roll it over and see what it could mean as it affected Rose Red. But Masterman wasn't clever at that kind of thing. He was too simple-honest, too impetuous, too much off his guard, with his bright eyes telling how much he wanted to know. Nor was I up to it myself. He and I were sons of the earth, made to serve her, and even on occasion dominate her. We didn't belong in lawyers' pens. But Hamlin answered him patiently, candidly, it was evident, and with no particular interest in his own tastes as he was called upon to map them out. Yes, he had travelled extensively in Europe, not beyond. No, he wasn't a socialist. Some very good fellows were, he believed. He understood there was a lot to complain of in the system of things. And so on, a tepid answer bearing testimony to his preference for the middle course, but always curving back the talk, when he could manage it, to our own exploits in Peru. He persisted in regarding them as exploits; and when we decried them slightly, he said, with a conclusiveness he evidently thought unanswerable:

"Well, but they've been written up, you know."

We laughed rather shamefacedly, just because we were so ingenuously pleased to have them written up.

He gave us no time to deny our just sentiments, but plumped at us a question that had mysteriously, as he saw it, some tremendous weight.

"Where are you going next?"

We looked at each other guiltily. Our talk together, up to this time, had always been prefaced by "ifs". *If* we should cut stick again! We knew pretty well geographically what we should do, but hardly what we had a right to do, with two age-foundered aunts in harbor.

"The aunts think we're going to settle down," I temporized, and Hamlin answered me almost passionately:

"Settle down! You! after all you've done? You won't. You can't. I say, you two—" His voice dropped here. It became the pleading of a boy who has no right to the secret passion he is begging you to appease—"whatever it is, let me—let me go with you."

Masterman grew white with the pure surprise of it. I lost my breath for a second, and perhaps I, too, looked white; but I picked up in time to blurt out:

"But you can't, you know. You—" Here I stopped, but they both knew perfectly well what my intemperate tongue would have added: "You're married to Rose Red. You're bound with gold chains to the heavenly chariot of heart's content. You've got to make her happiness. You can't go off climbing peaks, and freezing and starving and fighting the horrible goddess life. You've got to stay here and cherish life, make a warm nest for it. You're the husband of Rose Red."

And while we stared at one another in an extremity of feeling that seemed to have no adequate cause, a

voice came from below, flute-like, a voice we knew.

"You boys up there?"

Masterman was out of his seat and, with one bound, at the door. I drew forward a little rocking-chair I knew. It had been sitting in a corner ever since we went away, covered with the flag Masterman and I had worked two summers to buy. (Masterman used to say we worked for it till nobody would have us, and then we worked the aunts.)

"Why," said Hamlin, in a tone of wonder, "that's Rose."

"Yes," said I, in excitement and a momentary base willingness he should see there were more roses than one. There was his Rose, but there might be ours too. "That's Rose."

And meantime her light step had brought her up the stair, and Masterman was conducting her in—this with a tender, blundering haste, as if nothing so precious as this visit had ever happened, and yet nothing could have been so surely expected, because it tailed on to the visits of long ago. She was over the sill, a wraith of a thing, with her shadowy hair and pale cheeks that used to be so bright, and Hamlin was the first she saw. Her eyes fell upon him before ever her smiling at Masterman had done, and as she saw him she shrank and withered. It was a horrible sight, that first instinctive recoil from the man she should have welcomed. Hamlin saw it as I did, and he too shrank and paled; and for that second the two stood there, the width of the room between them, as if it were some awful, unseen gulf. She recovered herself instantly, the woman's way.

"Fred!" she said, with a pretty intonation of affectionate surprise. "I didn't know you were here."

"No," said he, awkwardly, "I knew you didn't."

He, too, had risen, and we all seemed, in a foolish rivalry, to be offering her a seat. In smiling control of herself now, she took the little chair; but Hamlin did not return to his.

"I've got to go on up to the Branch," he said, in quite a commonplace tone, "to see if my saddle's mended. Shall I drop in for you on the way back?"

"You needn't, dear," said she, in her nicest manner. "I shall be home long before you."

Then Hamlin went, and Ralph and I stood at the stairhead and called down robust good-bys, the more scrupulous in that it somehow seemed to us his stock was very patently depreciated; and we returned to Rose who, with her hand on the old brown volume of Grimm to which her chair was neighbor, was, for the first time since our coming, Rose Red again. I could have cried—Ralph says he did feel his throat balling up—to see how swiftly and pathetically she had taken on her own look, the look of one undaunted by any aspect of life because life had always been so kind to her.

"Now, boys, talk," said she, and though we understood this meant Peru, we had for the moment nothing to tell. But she questioned us skilfully, avowed her ignorance of high places, wanted to learn what posies grew wild there, and before we knew it, we were talking fourteen to the dozen, and had forgotten such a chap as Hamlin ever lived. She, too, forgot all about her pact of being home before him, and one o'clock

struck the hour when our suburb dines the year round, before she remembered that this was New England, and not Peru. Then she rose in a gayety of haste, and Masterman, foolishly prolonging old time cheer, broke our moment into bits.

"We're nothing but blooming rattletraps," said he. "How about you, Rose? We haven't said a word about you."

She paled. The smitten look came back. Some physical blow might well have struck all eagerness from her face.

"I?" she maundered. "Oh, you know all about me. I haven't been to Peru."

And she smiled at us in the old dear way, and took her parasol and was gone. We had no conclusions to exchange, Masterman and I. She had not been married two years, and she was at bitter odds with something. Why?

"Do you know," said Ralph that night, as we sat in the silence that served us for great companionship, "it's occurred to me that the detective stories are all rotten."

"Why?"

"Because they puddle over what happened. They don't care a hang what made it happen. A man is killed. We try to guess who killed him. If we had any effective force, we should find out why he was likely to be killed, and find out before it happened. Then likely it wouldn't happen at all."

"You mean, if Hamlin poisoned Rose Red——"

"Don't!"

"Or she poisoned him, we should be all agog bring-

ing somebody to justice. But now, when they look infernally tragic, and yet haven't broken the law, we still ought to find out what's doing?"

"Yes. Something *is* the matter. If we don't find out, we can't quash it."

"Maybe," I suggested, "it isn't our business. There's something peculiarly offensive and defensive about the marriage bond."

"It's my business," said he briefly, "whether it's yours or not."

And whether I owned to it as crudely, I was watching and speculating for all I was worth. We watched her and we studied him. All our conclusions agreed. She spoke to him sweetly from what seemed even a compassionate regard, she fulfilled toward him all the outward observances of courtesy. But she was either afraid of him or she had for him some degree of that repulsion which is scorn. He, too, was afraid, not of her, it might be, but of some unspoken inner judgment, whereof he caught the savor. He did not propitiate her. He was, we began dimly to see, too reasonably constituted, grounded by birth and tradition in the rules of living as they obtain between woman and man. Yet plainly there was an inner judgment of hers, and it did set them irremediably apart. And at this stage, seeing it was something between the two that in no manner concerned any one outside their little kingdom of revolt, we gave up the job. It was all very well for Masterman to argue it was his business because it affected Rose. It simply wasn't, and he knew it. Nobody could help. We must leave Rose Red to her imprisonment in the dungeon she had found, by

ill chance, within her castle of delight. We would go away. If Rose had been afraid of her husband we couldn't have gone; but it was apparent that both of them were afraid of some trap between them. And whoever had set it, the trap was theirs.

"But," said Masterman, when we owned our common aversion to the case as a case, "something, sometime, will chuck the clue into our hands."

"Why will it?"

"Because that's the way things are. I don't believe your Burns or your Sherlock really braids the rope that hangs a man. No, he braids and braids, and gets infernally stale over it, and then suddenly some little kobold leaps out of the bush and twists all the strands he's just made up his mind to drop. No, you do the work, your part of it, and because you've done it, something passes you the clue."

"Your rhetoric's mixed," said I.

"No matter. I know what I mean—and it's so."

Then the incredible happened. The aunts, of all rooted creatures in the world, they who had been wedded to one spot through all the years of our troublesome nurture, the aunts disclosed to us their intention of going abroad. We were mightily pleased, chiefly because that proved they still had the spirit to conceive it, and instantly offered to put them in the way of a fair start and a luxurious progress. But what fell upon us then was the implication that we were to take them. We who had dragged ourselves over unkindly heights, and snatched breath out of rarefied air, were to potter round the beaten ways of Europe with two darling spinsters, who might—we were rather galled under

that suspicion—have concocted the scheme for our sole benefit. We were wanderers by nature. It drove them to a mild distraction to see us mulling over maps, picking out the insufficiently charted spots to travel in. Our immediate safety was assured, so they benevolently reasoned, by going abroad with them. Thus were we to satisfy our gypsy cravings while sticking strictly to the spots whereof picture postals are made. If we were taking a funicular to Fiesole, we couldn't, at the same time, be rampaging up savage cliffs.

"Allee samee, we've got to go with them," said Masterman, gloomily, when we met in the loft to consider it.

"We owe it to them," I responded in the old phrase, from as inexorable a certainty that certain debts had to be paid.

"Sure! But what if we didn't? If two such infernal old trumps want to go abroad again, why, they've got to do it, that's all, and go the way they like."

This was in September, and actually in October we sailed, each of us the rather awkward convoy of an aunt, but resolved to show ourselves good and grateful wards. Hamlin was the last man to bid us good-by. He came to the station where Aunt Clara was adjusting a lavender ribbon on her trunk, having removed the red one she had affixed the previous week—this because red began to seem to her the color of universal choice. He shook hands, with an air of liking us very much, and feeling sure we could have helped him.

"I say, you know," he volunteered, just as Rose came up and offered to tie Aunt Clara's ribbon, "you won't forget?"

There was nothing we were aware of having promised to remember; and he continued instantly, with the implication of suddenly recalling that his request was more important to him than to us.

"If you find you're going on any sort of exploring trip, just count me in."

Masterman, with a rueful look, indicated the aunts where they stood, frail, and yet undaunted in their determination to carry the traditions of the suburb into a foreign continent.

"We're hardly likely to do much batting round," he suggested.

"I know, I know," Hamlin concurred, with his nervous conclusiveness. "But after this—any time, you know."

And then Rose had turned to us and said: "Good-by, boys. Good luck." The smoke of the train was casting its cloud behind, and for the first time we thought the aunts trembled before their venture, and we snatched in wild joyousness at the hope that they might give it up. We should have lain down at their feet, I believe, if they had, and begged them to walk on us to ways of security and peace. But they called on the unchanging fibre within them, doubtless for our sakes, and we dutifully supported them on board.

The winter passed in a conventional progress, under which the aunts throve and Masterman and I sank. We learned to know the capitals of Europe in all their capacity for giving pain—pain of boredom, wet and cold. He and I hated *pensions*. The aunts loved them, because they afforded social intercourse. We hated the promenades of southern watering-places, and were

made indescribably wretched by being expected to *flaner* before shop windows, where the aunts expressed the most persistent interest in what they had no idea of buying. But what could you do? They were darling aunts, and we owed them everything. One reward we had: they seemed to grow more indestructible every day, and we knew at last that, if they had kept the life in our young bodies by strenuous coddling when our pretty mothers died, at least we were pumping a few extraneous years of vitality into them by abetting them in sheer fun as they saw it. But at Lugano, one languorous day in the early summer, we gave out. It came upon us simultaneously, and the expression of it, uttered while we sat under an oleander, sorting picture cards so that the aunts should send them in the order of topographical lucidity, was my saying, out of no voluntary choice, and hardly knowing why I said it:

"We could climb the Matterhorn."

Masterman did not even answer with any directness. He merely shuffled the cards together and tucked them into their envelope.

"I'll go in and tell them," he said, and go he did.

They were as surprised by the suddenness of it as I, and chiefly on that account they yielded. Or had they anticipated some divagation of the sort, and now accepted it as less serious than they had feared? Also the sense of lightness, of variety, bound to uplift the traveller abroad, whispered them that it would be no ill matter, but rather a novelty the more, to be left at Lugano in charge of their own fate. They merely specified that we were to take care of ourselves and come back soon. Of course we said nothing about the Matter-

horn. That grim entity never once punctuated the discussion. We merely said we were going, with their accord, up to Zermatt for a breath of mountain air.

To Zermatt we went, gayer with every inch of altitude, more like boys released from tasks that yesterday had looked perennial. We went up by train, and also from Zermatt on, because we had to be back with the aunts in a reasonable time. We got into fits of laughter over it all, our dash for exhilaration, and a little red-headed English parson across the aisle watched us with a tolerant interest. Finally he threw us a comment on the day, and we gathered that he, too, though unconsciously, was a little drunk on air. He was enchanted with the idea of climbing the Matterhorn, of our doing it, while he offered sage suggestion. He seemed, at that altitude, to think it a mere question of vim and go, and as to a guide, he scouted it. Our forethought and our shoes he alike despised, intimating that he could climb the Matterhorn in his ecclesiastical garb.

"Even," Masterman told him, "the apron and gaiters of your future."

He smiled at that, but insisted that the precursors, Tyndall and the rest, had robbed the adventure of its quality by their "ropes and things".

In a pause of this descriptive fluency, while he was temporarily engaged with the bleak world beside the track, I turned to Masterman.

"I've been thinking," I said, "about Rose."

He nodded.

"So have I," said he, "all night. As if she were near."

An unaccountable prescience came over me.

"Ralph," I said, "if it hadn't been Hamlin, it ought to have been you."

He said nothing; but I knew he could not resent the baldness of it. I saw how he had cherished the idea of her, not in the least as I had, as an unattainable dream, but a present necessity of his life. A height always affected me foolishly. It made Masterman melancholy and silent, but it loosed my thoughts and tongue.

"I'm out of it," I said. "I'd do anything for her, anything. But you're the man."

Still he said nothing, and we came to the land of thin air and snow, and little black pools and ominously dark birds hovering over them, and there we stayed all night, the Englishman with us, rather more respectful of our respect for mountains, the colder he grew and the tighter the air bound his feet with invisible chains the night had ready. And in the morning, overlooking that icy edge of the world, we bade him good-by, and with Max Stiege, prince of guides, began our climb. As a feat, it was climbing made easy, after our unattended forays in the south. But the Matterhorn hadn't made it easy. You could fancy it frozen there in a rage at the chains put upon it by the dauntlessness of man.

Not three hours up that cruel inaccessibility, we came on a black figure prone across a jag of rock, as if he had fallen and the rock impaled him. Stiege put his great hands to the man, and turned him face upward to the day, and we got brandy into him. A lone man, a fool climbing without a guide. We swore over him while we used the oxygen, and when he opened his

eyes we swore again to another note. For this was Hamlin. As soon as he got hold of himself he struck our ministrants away, not, as I thought, from deliberate purpose to die, but because the hostility of the outer world had crazed him. There was left within him only an instinct of resistance, a mad determination not to endure defeat. But we turned brandy into him, we covered him with our jackets, and he lay looking at us, the agonized stare of the departing soul that has much to say, and finds, instead of ordered words, confusion. That look of his eyes had heartbreak in it, too, from a foolish reason, but a very real one. They were near-sighted eyes, and without their glasses they wore a pleading softness. Mastermen bent over him. He, with a more direct cognition than mine, understood what must be asked.

"Where is she?"

The eyes seemed to make a sign, the slightest quiver of the lid to the invisible safety below.

"Zermatt?" Masterman prompted.

The eyes said, "Yes." Then Hamlin seemed to gather himself for the last disastrous leap, that wild expenditure of breath whereby he must reach bankruptcy the sooner.

"Tell her—" he stopped.

"Tell her—" Masterman repeated.

"I don't understand—about London. I never did."

And then, as we began the oxygen again, he died, as if he willed it, in the face of science.

Masterman could not believe it. He was wild with anguish, and long after the moment of hope was over, he kept up the fight. But Max Stiege and I knew it, and so

did Masterman at last, and that the only thing to do for Hamlin was to carry him down to Zermatt to his waiting wife; and when Masterman admitted it, he gave a big sob like a woman and helped us readily. I believe at the instant Hamlin seemed dearer to him than I, dearer than Rose, perhaps—for whatever the mischance between them the man belonged to Rose, and he was dead.

When we had made our difficult way to the Gorner Grat, there was the Englishman ready to chaff us because we had retreated; but finding what wreckage we bore, he sobered and helped us greatly. He had really lingered at the Gorner Grat out of some kindliness for us, to see how we liked that needle of the upper sleet, and now, with Stiege, took charge of our miserable departing.

"Does anybody know the man?" he asked Stiege, and we left Stiege to answer, "No." Then, in the course of our terrible preparations, he did see Hamlin's face. That was his clue, the clue he didn't seek, the clue he tossed to us.

"My God!" he breathed, at first in awe, and then reverently, as if appalled by the ordered paths of life. "That's my man."

"What man?" Masterman demanded savagely.

At last we were to know Hamlin. At the same instant we were sure of it. The Englishman, in that instant, could no more help telling than we could help asking.

"It was two years ago," said he, "in London, near the Strand. There was a runaway. This man was there, a lady with him. There was the runaway. This man

leaped aside. He pushed a woman, to get free. She was killed, the woman. It was over in an instant. Nobody seemed to see how it was, nobody but me."

"Did she see it?" Masterman asked, steadily. "His wife—the lady, I should say?"

"I don't know. I hope not. That would have been infernal. And I don't know whether she was his wife. She was frightened, for she fell, fainted, perhaps, and I saw her put into a cab."

I saw Masterman rejecting the clue as I rejected it. Now we had it, we didn't want the horrible thing. We would have given worlds not to have had it. Masterman laughed rather foolishly, in the feint of tearing up the clue.

"You wouldn't know him again," he said, "a live man in the Strand and this dead man here."

The Englishman faced him down indignantly.

"Rather," said he immovably, in the tone of those who have set their empire beyond the seas. "I'll tell you how I know. In the instant after the woman dropped, this fellow reeled back, he shut his eyes for one second only, and he looked as if he were already dead. He saw what he'd done, d'ye see? He saw what he'd done. And he looked as he does now."

"We must get rid of him," I said to Ralph, on the safe way down to Zermatt. "He mustn't see her. He's got too keen an eye."

He nodded. But chance was good to us there, for our helpful Englishman found a telegram at the hotel, and it hurried him away. I felt dazed with the strangeness, the intention of it all. Had we two come up

here to the Matterhorn because we had desired the clue, and that was where the clue could be given us? I turned drunkenly to Ralph.

"I don't understand it," I babbled. "I can't."

"You mean you won't," he said doggedly. "It's plain enough."

"Was he a coward? Had she seen that—in the Strand? Was he forever after trying to reinstate himself with her? Did he climb the Matterhorn for that—like a desperate fool, alone, with not even a flask in his pocket, and in—O my God!—in those shoes? Do you remember his shoes?"

"Yes," said Masterman, dryly, "I saw his shoes."

And because his voice sounded as if it might break and curse or sob, I gave over baiting him.

I was the one to tell Rose Red. Masterman said I was, and I couldn't dispute it for a moment. There were things to be said that Masterman mustn't say, because his faith to her must not be violated; yet he must hear them lest he afterward deny them to her. We went up to her sitting-room, and she came forward to meet us, dear Rose Red, all surprise and joy in us. But she was not happy even yet: more of a woman, perhaps, with a wistful pathos between her brows. She looked at us, first one and then the other.

"What is it?" she asked.

Then I did my big deed, the one I am prouder of than all the quiet honest ways I have lived since.

"Your husband—" said I.

"Yes," she prompted.

"Your husband was on that devil of a Matterhorn. He found a chap cast away there. He gave him his

brandy, gave him his clothes. The other man came down. Hamlin——"

Her eyes shone with a terrible anguish of exultation.

"He died," she said.

"Of exhaustion," I told her.

"Where is the man he saved? I must see him. I must hear—" She was all a passionate haste.

It was leading me further than I had stopped to consider. That is the revenge of lies. They laugh at us and take us centuries out of our way; for they, too, are on the side of God, and would gladly die for him and for his worlds. But I couldn't flinch.

"The man we lost in the flurry," I told her. "He'd been through too much. His head wasn't quite right, either, nor Ralph's. I'm the only one that got the story straight. Ralph came up later. He never saw the man at all. But he was the one to ease Hamlin for that few minutes before——"

She turned from one to the other of us in a dumb inquiry it was terrible to see. Was there no more, it said? Could the man she had loved slip away from her into everlasting silence and leave not the thinnest whisper on the air.

"There was the message, Ralph," I said, roughly. My lie had made a different man of me. I clung to it doggedly as a criminal to a misbegotten deed; but I was suddenly furious with circumstance for having forced me to that ill companionship.

"A message?" Her look of hunger wrung my heart to bleeding, and I loved my lie.

"'Tell her,' said Ralph, 'I don't understand—about London. I never did.'" This he said grimly, as if

it saved his reason to have something to bring her that was true. I knew Ralph. He hated and loved my lie as I did. But he loved me for telling it.

Rose, incredulous joy upon her face, thanked God, and let her tears flow, and told us God had sent us to Hamlin and to her.

"We mustn't speak of this," I assured her, fencing my lie with all the guile I had. "The man he saved—when he comes to himself he'll feel like a cur for going. There'll be inquiries—talk—talk. We want to get you away, to the aunts down there. We'll say we found him dying of exhaustion. You'd be willing? He doesn't need credit with the world, if he's got his credit mark from you."

She put her hand on my arm, partly in agreement, partly to help her weakness.

"It shall be—everything shall be as you think best," she said. "No matter whether anybody knows he died gloriously, if we know it, we three——"

"Yes," said Masterman, and his hand was on my shoulder. He was comforting me for my lie, blessing me for it, old Masterman, "we know."

GOLDEN BABY

WE were in the *Sycorax* smoking-room, within an hour of turning the lights out for the night. The air was gray with smoke, and everybody, even the men that made it, looked dulled by it. The scion of one of our oldest families, who had seized the occasion of an ocean voyage for extravagant over-indulgence, sat at a little table, monotonously repeating, "She was the fairest of all the country round," in a tone of eccentric rhetorical emphasis. Nobody took any notice of him, because we had ceased doing that when he introduced us, one by one, to the aura of his ancestor who had "preceded Sir Philip Sidney at the battle of Zutphen." What he meant by that initiatory phrase we never knew. We were merely convinced, one after another, by the sound of it, that we weren't strong enough to hear it again. The man who was travelling round the globe on his own private fortune to discover a parasite for hostile bugs was absorbedly making diagrams of larvæ and what he called winged coleoptera for a buyer of seersucker, who was not listening to him, and the big fellow with the grizzled beard and the William Morris look of the eyes was sunk in some private reverie of his own. Suddenly the clerical young fellow opposite him asked him a question, whereupon he leaned back in his chair, gripped

the beer glass before him as if he might sling it, and began, in a voice like a bell:

"Logic is a fool. The mystery your calling is founded on is no more a mystery than a million others. You simply fail to get the connections. I could tell you a dozen tales more unaccountable than that, because they're just ripped out of the air and made manifest. It's as if you should go out there on deck and see a film of some kind of impalpable parchment hanging from the topmast. You'd send up a man, he'd bring it down to you, and you'd find on it characters you could seem to read; but the story they made would say nothing whatever to you. I mean, it couldn't be hitched on to the general course of things. Now I'll give you a case in point."

He had given us no cases in point throughout the voyage. He had simply rowed about labor and capital, and said one was as bad as the other, capital being only labor reversed, and we thought we had discovered his pet nursling of a fad and just what road it was leading him. Now two or three other men looked up, and then moved a little nearer. They scented story as you do when you buy the new magazine and are lotting on having it to go to bed on. The scion of the noble family leaned back in his chair, regarded us haughtily, and said, "What's all this?" in a loud tone nobody noticed except discouragingly because he was making more noise. We left him to the solace of it, and drew up in a circle about the William Morris man. He had put the tip of his blunt finger—the kind of digit artisans work wonders with—delicately into a little pond of beer on the table and drawn out a line from it like a

peninsula. Then he dabbled his finger again and put it down in another place, to make an island, and another. A merchant of many sorts of goods, who sailed all seas, burst out there, with a sudden recognition:

"Why, you're making islands!"

A white-faced young man of no breadth and inconsiderable stature, who, we understood, had some reputation as a poet of the minor variety, bent over the table and put on his large horn-bowed spectacles to look. He, too, spoke with an irrational quickness, as if everything the William Morris man did suddenly bore a meaning. It seemed as if the man had turned on his battery and we had become aware of his voltage.

"Do you suppose that's how God did it?" asked the little poet. "Before He 'came to the making of man'?"

But the William Morris man never answered him. He did look up at the merchant.

"Yes," he said, "it's the West Indies." Then he hunched his big frame back in his chair and began speaking, rather slowly and in a quiet voice, as if what he had to tell bore for him a significance of a particular and really a solemn nature.

"It was a week before Christmas when we sailed. Some company—it was a bum company and went to pieces afterward when its unseaworthy boats had all gone cranky, one way or another, and the public had turned back to the old standbys that rule the wave and sap the pocket—this company—I forget the name—had bought an old boat for a song and a promise, knocked out bulkheads, furbished up some dog-holes for new staterooms, put in red velvet and gilding, called her the *Siren*, and advertised a grand excursion

to the West Indies. Somehow the idea took. It had been a nasty winter, there was easy money, and without much delay the *Siren's* list was full. I was among the first to take passage. I was done up that winter with statistics and the deviltry of the rich and, besides, I'd always wanted a sniff of sugar, rum and spices on their own ground. When I went on board there was a great copper sunset; it looked as if it belonged to the land exclusively and we might never have a whack at such another when we'd left New York behind us. I turned to look at it, as I'd been turning all the way along, and I stood there till the splendors and banners of it blinded me. So when I went aboard things were dark before me momentarily, in queer shapes, the outlines of warehouses and such, and I didn't feel that I'd really seen anything, until, on the deck at the end of the gangplank, I came face to face with a coolie woman, the thinnest of her sort, with bare feet and legs, bare arms, the slightest possible garment, and a weight of silver bangles on her wrists and collars round her neck. She stood there holding a child, a baby with a queer expression of maturity, and her eyes as she looked at me were black and solemn. They seemed to talk in a language of their own, to sing things maybe, chant 'em —talking wasn't good enough—and they made me shiver. The child sat there supported on the crook of her arm and looked at me as seriously as she did, but with a kind of well-wishing, too, as if he said:

"'Old man, you're tired, aren't you? Everybody's tired. Glad you're shut of little old New York for a spell. Wish all of 'em could do the same.'

"What came into my mind—I don't see why—was

that he was a kind of golden baby. Maybe it was because he had bright hair—an image to be worshipped —and my mind said inside, as plain as your lips might speak it, 'Golden Baby!' I felt I liked him, too, better than any piece of littleness I'd ever seen. And then, in the same minute—for it all passed as quickly as you might set your foot on deck and lift the other foot to keep it company—the coolie woman and the golden baby were gone, and there was a spot of blackness where he'd been.

A sailor was passing me with an end of a rope.

"'Where's the woman?' I asked, before I could stop myself.

He gave me a glance, and said, 'Sir?' without stopping, because he was evidently on business of the ship.

"'The woman and the child,' I called after him.

"I felt I'd got to know. But he shook his head and went along, and I felt disappointed, as if I'd lost something. But there was one queer thing. A darkness in the outline of the child stood before my eyes until I'd got into my stateroom and after. I couldn't rub it away.

"Well, gentlemen, that voyage was a corker for sheer madness of the human creature let loose. We hadn't been a day out before I knew what we'd got aboard—mothers that regarded the boat as a summer hotel and had fitted out their daughters with every rag known to milliners, to sell 'em in the market of some rich man's desire. That was the first—exhibit A. Then there were copper kings whose copper queens hadn't any chance to show off their diamonds and pearls and

loot of the earth and sea in the regulation manner, and brought it all on board to flout the moon and stars, I guess, and the Creator of the moon and stars, and the other folks He'd made that had more or hadn't so many, each in a different way. It was all money and class hatred and scorn and contumely."

Here the scion of a noble stock broke in, his dreary drone addressed to none of us in particular:

"Sir Philip Sidney, let me inform you. Sir Philip Sidney! Battle of Zutphen!"

"That's it," said the William Morris man, quietly. "That just it. There were a few of 'em on board just like him. They'd had ancestors at Zutphen, and they wouldn't speak to the Semitic walking diamond-shops, nor me because I said I'd been in a foundry, nor the captain even, because he wasn't a *von*. Intercourse was restricted because they could only speak to one another, and they'd trodden that ground so long that they had only common recollections to go on, and I felt they were the best bored set on the boat. But in spite of all the hatreds and mildew of exclusiveness, the same old farce obtained that they were all enjoying themselves immensely. The decks were canvassed in nearly every night and the stars shut out, so that those apes of various degrees could put on their gimcracks borrowed from the earth and sea, and dance and strut under the light of electric bulbs with backgrounds of flags and paper garlands. Great Israel! I wonder the Lord of all don't turn His face away from the whole bloomin' show sometimes and say, 'I'm sick of vaudeville.'

"Well, as days went on, I can't tell you how or why,

I began to be conscious of hate, hate everywhere. Whether it was the heat and madness of the tropics that got into our blood and set it seething, I don't know, or whether it was the revenge of big nature rising up against fool civilization—we were separated into as many little cliques and parties as the factions in a South-American state. I was out of the whole thing, not because I was better, but because I was worse. They hated one another, and I hated them all with a glorious impartiality. We'd gone due south, struck Jamaica, steamed on to the Isthmus, and then skirted the coast to Trinidad and dipped down beyond the mouth of the Orinoco, with the Southern Cross dominant now and the Dipper selling short. And suddenly one night about eleven, when the band was whanging away at a popular waltz and girls were swishing their muslins and laces round the deck in time, the boat stopped. You know there's always an underconsciousness of danger at sea, in the thickest-hided. No man forgets he's over an unplumbed abyss, except maybe he's in his cups and taking the return trip to Zutphen. So when the motion—there wasn't much of it on that sea—when it fell into a calm, the dancing grigs stopped, I suppose as the dancers did in 'Belgium's capital' when George Osborne got his summons to go and be killed, and wondered what the god of the machinery was going to do to them. We stopped, and we stayed so. I was on the hurricane-deck, and I came down with that same premonition of panic in me—I'm an old sailor, but I did feel actual panic—and the first man I met, making his thirty-six-inch strides along the deck, was the second officer.

He was a good fellow; I hadn't hated him. We'd chummed together quite a lot on the voyage. I've grinned since to think how I greeted him inanely.

"'We've stopped,' said I.

"'Yes,' said he, two paces away from me.

"'What for?' I called, knowing I shouldn't be told.

"'Don't know, sir,' he returned. I knew he was entrenched in official reserve and not the accessible fellow I'd smoked my pipe with.

"Well, gentlemen, we had stopped, and there we hung all that night, and the next morning we were there still, a little motion under us, the very least, like the sound, so far as motion might be, of tiny ripples lapping on the beach. Everybody came haggard to breakfast. Nobody had slept, except some of the rummies who were in that condition of tissue where you might call 'em permanently asleep. The crew, such of them as I saw at intervals, seemed also to be in a state of tension. Then the questions began, fired by the broadside and popping like guerrilla warfare, always to the same tune: What was the matter? The answer reassured us briefly. It was no longer, 'We don't know.' 'Some trouble with the engine,' we were assured. 'The engineer's at it now.' So we went on eating, and fault-finding when our toast varied in brownness, and hating one another; but the day, the sulky, burning tropical day, went by, and the tropical night with its quick onrush of stars, and still we hadn't moved. That next morning I met the wireless man at the rail, where he's gone to lean both arms and, it seemed, throw some problem of his own at the bright horizon-line. He was a little, round, oily, dark fellow with

curly hair, and in spite of his fatness his face looked funnily tragic with anxiety, as if he were going to cry. At once I felt he was pretty well shaken, and he'd tell me what's the matter.

"'Have you tried wireless?' I asked, in the fatuous way we have of baiting with a commonplace when we mean to fish up something that might dart and elude us unless it thought it was snapping at the same old fly. He shook his head as if he shook me off. I'd thought he knew nothing but wireless, but it was evident he sized me up for the ass I was.

"'Tried it?' he said. 'What else?'

"'Well, don't you get anything?'

He shook his head again.

"'Why don't you keep on trying? There must be stations down here—there must be ships—'

"'They don't answer,' he said. It was almost as if with another word he might break down actually. 'I've changed my tune, and changed it—changed it. I can't get them.'

"He turned abruptly as if he were really concealing tears now, and ran up the ladder to his post. Then I went away to think. I was afraid, sheer afraid, and wondered at myself. You see, I've no more pluck than any man of my inches, but I'd been about a good bit. I'd seen adventure and heard other fellows talk it over, and I knew you're pretty sure to get out of everything with a whole skin till that last particular time when you don't—so what's the use of grizzling? But this time there was panic in my left waistcoat pocket, neatly sewed in to stay, and I knew it and hated it for being there. There was foul weather all

over the ship. Nobody sang, nobody strummed the light guitar as one girl had been doing till we wished she was at home in the kitchen with a consignment of pots and pans to wash. New York hated Jerusalem more frankly than ever, and Jerusalem wagged its fat chin and openly put up its beak at New York. Hate! Talk about the wars of nations! If that ship couldn't have made use of a whole Hague conference all to herself, it wasn't because she wasn't sick for it and only needed diagnosis to have it prescribed. Toward night I climbed up to the door of the little wireless cage, and stopped there, hat in hand, if you'll believe me. I don't know what kind of besetment made me feel as if every Jack on board that ship was in as tight a place as he could breathe in, and that every lubber that spoke to them had got to walk Spanish. He looked up at me. His tired little eyes were set in a bed of wrinkles. It hadn't been long, this universal panic of the ship, but it had had time to eat into him and change him, from a fat little manipulator who'd learned to do a certain thing, to a crying, hungering soul in trouble, beseeching—maybe with no voice, only with those eyes and that quiver of a mouth—beseeching the Lord of things big and little to lift him out of the pit he's stumbled into. I don't know whether the wireless chap ever heard of the Psalmist, but if he had, I bet he was tuning his own little pipe to him that minute.

"'Go down,' said he, looking at me as if I were in pinafores.

"That was all. But I felt I must speak. I had an ass's desire to bray and a meddler's insane push to

help on somehow. I'd got to help the ship on. We all felt so. One man in the smoking-room—we kept it all of a cloud now, we smoked so hard and universally—he told me he felt as if he must get out and push, even if he drowned in doing it. He gave a queer little catch in his throat when he said it. If it had been a woman that gave that sound, you'd have said it was a sob. 'That's it,' two or three other men had said, and looked the same way, and it was ten to one that, give them a lead, they'd have sobbed, too. It was then I had lighted out. I was afraid we should all be in hysterics together like a girl's boarding-school. But the wireless man:

"'I beg pardon,' I said to him.

"'Go down,' said he.

"'I beg your pardon,' I said again, 'but mightn't there be—isn't there—some sort of magnetic field, and mightn't we be inside it?'

"He laughed a little—a shrill hoot all scorn and tiredness.

"'Magnetic grandmother!' said he. 'Go down.'

"Then I went.

"Well, whatever it was that stopped stayed stopped. Life hung fire. Electricity hadn't played us false. There were plenty of lights, as faithful as the night. It wasn't true that according to the old tune—it ran in my head all the time then—'water wouldn't quench fire, fire wouldn't burn axe,' and the rest of it. Fire was faithful and cooked us three—no, by George! six times a day the most elaborate and embroidered and sinful meals for richness the tropics ever saw. But we simply didn't move, and now the mischief was so patent, the whole thing grew so upsetting and queer,

that the usual disciplinary silence cracked and broke. The captain made no secret of it. The mate made none, nor the chief engineer. He, I found out, was spending his time digging into his engine, prying into her heart to find out whether she'd got some deadly secret he hadn't shared. At last he was crying over her, the chief electrician told me afterward. But they made no secret, any of them. There was nothing the matter anywhere. The engine simply would not go. And we saw no ship and we saw no land, and wireless wouldn't talk. The only creatures on the ship that showed any animation because they hadn't time to break, were the stewards and I suppose the *chef*, though I never saw him, and the band. For according to the notion that you can ensure a man against panic by making a noise or stuffing him, they kept the band playing the last comic-opera airs, and the stewards brought on more food, food, food, and offered it up to the god that's in every man's belly. I'll say right here that I never knew stewards so overworked as those poor devils had been from the start, and by now they were so pasty-pale it made you ashamed of yourself, if you were an able-bodied man, to ring a bell and see 'em totter out and start into that perfunctory sprightliness—you know it. See it here on this very ship; but these boys look better, a heap better. The stewards on the *Siren* made you want to say, 'For God's sake, give me the key of the pantry and I'll get it myself.'

"Well, one night, as if a great bubble burst in the air, something happened. Don't you know how it feels when your head's sort of muffled and woozy, and suddenly something clicks in your ear, and everything

clears and lightens, and you find yourself out in the open? This was exactly that way. We were all on deck, packed into our rows of steamer chairs—I believe we were afraid of going below, and besides it was hot—and the band was dashing along from:

"'Oh, I am the King of Gold,
And I made it all myself;
My heart and brain I sold
In accumulating pelf,'

to the Sylvia ballet music, when a man down the line of chairs somewhere—I never knew who he was—burst out into a kind of screech: 'Stop that band! For God's sake, stop that band!'

"We didn't have to. The band stopped. I believe it knew, instruments and all, that we had had every hair's weight we could endure, and that it had blared out all the breath it could spare, and had got either to scream or die dead from tiredness and fear. And then I turned my head a little—I don't know why: I felt as if I had been called—and in a veil of darkness by the rail pretty well aft I saw them, the coolie woman and the baby. 'Golden Baby!' I caught myself saying, under my breath, 'Golden Baby!'

"And at once my fear passed away from me as the shadow passes when the cloud moves on. Something snapped—that same lightening like a bubble's breaking—and something came up in me that was like summer mornings and being young. I felt it going all over the ship, as if there'd been long breaths—what the stories call breaths of relief—and I knew I was in the midst

of a flood of the same kind of sudden happiness. I had time to ask myself why, why, and to wonder a little, because the ship hadn't started and we were in exactly as bad case as before. But that I couldn't stop to think of, for my eyes were on the Golden Baby, and I seemed to be wanting to learn everything I could about him by heart, for fear I should never see him again. You know some minutes warn you they're going to be mighty short and you'd better take a snapshot of 'em while you can. The coolie woman stood there exactly as she'd stood on deck the first minute I saw her. She had on the same scanty, dignified garment down to her bare knees and thin legs, and the silver round her neck and on her arms shone out there in the dark. It seemed to shine like moonlight. The electric lights didn't touch her or the child. They were there in a darkness of their own, and it seemed as if they made their own light. The child sat on her arm and looked toward us and smiled. His hair was bright. His face was bright. Afterward I had a kind of feeling that he stretched out his arms toward us, but that I couldn't swear to. His smile was queer, too. Or, no, it wasn't queer. It was pretty much what you'd see in any baby, only more so. It wasn't—well, it wasn't benignant, you know; spiritual, you might call it, same as it is in pictures of—" He hesitated here, being, we thought, diffident about matters of accepted religion.

"Madonnas," said the little poet, raptly. He had hung on every word.

"Exactly, Madonnas. No, it was the way you'd like to have your own baby look, if he'd come in from play with his hands full of flowers. But the coolie

woman smiled. She held out her arms toward us, and him in them. And all along the line I knew women were holding out their arms toward the child; and the men—well, I guess they did what I did. I brought my feet down to the deck and sat up straight and bent forward. That's all the way I know how to express it. I wanted to get there, somewhere near the baby, and same time I knew I mustn't go any nearer, not a step. And the only relief I had was muttering, just as you'd breathe hard, 'Golden Baby!' Then the woman spoke. It was a kind of voice—well, I don't know exactly, a cool voice, smooth, kind of like a silver horn. Something shaking in it, too, something that trembled and yet had a power of its own, a vibration—I've never been able to describe it to myself, all the times I've tried, and I'm not having any better luck now. But there wasn't any mistake about what she said. 'You're keeping him back, and he's got to be there. Oh, don't! You mustn't keep him back.'"

"What language did she speak in?" asked the man that sought the parasites. He'd been listening very seriously, not in any spirit of unbelief, I could see, but with the gravity due a marvel.

The William Morris man nodded at him.

"I knew that would come," he said. "It came that very night, before we turned in. 'What language did she speak?' says the wireless man to me, and I carried the question on to the first mate. 'God, man, I don't know,' says he. 'She spoke, that's all I can say.'

"And a Frenchman that was going to write up Martinique as he saw it from the deck swore she spoke in French, and the German that played the trombone

said it was the best Hanoverian German. I knew well enough it wasn't either, but I didn't know what it was, and I didn't care. I only know she spoke and we understood. I didn't have much eyesight to spare from looking at the baby; but somehow I did realize that everything round me was different, and different all over the ship. Mrs.—I forget her condemned and sacred name—she was one of your Boston Apocalypse people, the kind that got transfigured on some mount or other and haven't spoken to anybody since—why, up to now she hadn't accepted anybody's being on that boat but herself and her two long-footed daughters and their following. And now she sat there with her hand on a bedizened Jewess's fat knee, and her daughters had hold of a school-teacher from the West—not with a ten-foot pole and a hook on the end of it, mind you, but as if they were constrained to hug somebody and it didn't matter whom. It was the same all over the ship. Something had lubricated us. Something had washed us clean. I understood, and at the same minute I knew they all understood, too. Hate had passed away, and in its place was the other word that's just as big. 'Golden Baby!' I says to myself. I saw he had done it, though I didn't know how. That didn't concern us somehow.

"The coolie woman seemed to come forward. I say seemed, though she didn't move a step, but we all knew she was nearer, every one of us, and that it wasn't important except as she brought the child. Anyhow, he seemed nearer, and if everybody felt as I did it was as if the child was warm and bright right in the midst of us. She spoke again.

"'That's it,' she said. 'That's good. When you feel like this it doesn't keep him back. Don't keep him back. He's needed so.'

"And then something happened. It was so gradual and so natural that at first we didn't realize what it was, only that everything in general was all right, and the sun would rise to-morrow on the good old practical world with no fear in it, and God was up there in His heavens wishing us well and not playing tricks on us. The ship was moving, that's what it was. There was the beat of the engine and the little heaving motion of a ship that begins to feel herself, though on smooth water. Then somebody began to cry and somebody else laughed, and we hugged each other, I guess, nobody particularly anxious to know whether he was hugging out of his class or not, and somehow or other the coolie woman and the Golden Baby were gone. But that night it seemed no more incredible to have them go than it did to have them come. And the engine was beating and the wireless man suddenly appeared among us, his flabby round face all puffed out again with satisfaction in his box of tricks, and he says:

"'There's a revolution in Haiti!'

"And we laughed louder and more foolishly, not because there was a revolution, but because it was such a joyful thing to have wireless say anything at all.

"'Let's have something to eat,' says somebody then, because we'd got used to eating as a kind of expression of emotion of any sort; but somebody else roared out: 'Let the stewards rest, can't you? Poor devils!'

"'Poor devils!' said somebody else, and then I

understood, and I guess everybody else did, that we not only impossibly loved one another, but we loved the pasty stewards, too.

"And we bunked down quietly that night, and there was no eating or drinking, only a kind of prayerful yearning over the engine that kept beating on, and thoughts we didn't dare to put into words about the Baby. And next day the engines were still going, and there was a breeze, and in some queer way we were a quiet, happy crew of people. And everybody spoke to everybody else."

"Where were the woman and the baby?" asked the parasite man. He was frowning a good deal and beating a forefinger silently on the table.

"I don't know."

"Don't know? Didn't you ask for them?"

"No."

"Didn't anybody?"

"No."

"Why didn't you ask?"

The William Morris man paused a long time here, and seemed to study the question in many aspects. Then he answered slowly:

"We knew we were not to ask. We knew they'd come for a special purpose. What it was didn't concern us, and we felt—we felt a loyalty to the child, a loyalty bigger than anything I'd ever felt before. I guess it was so with all of 'em."

"Did you ever see them again?"

"Oh, yes. We sailed north, touching at an island now and then, contented as you please, but solemn, changed in a way. I was changed. I guess they all

were. I haven't been the same man since. It was the pasty stewards on that trip that set me thinking labor and capital wasn't an institution to be sworn over. There was something to be done about it. Well, we kept our course north, and then we slid along the coast of Haiti, and the wireless man picked up more about the revolution. Hot as pepper it was, black as ink. And then one night off that coast—I never knew whether there was a harbor or not—the engines slowed down and we stopped. But queer as it was to stop again we didn't feel a breath of our old panic, only a solemn expectation. And we heard a stroke of oars, and before I knew what was doing there was the coolie woman, Golden Baby in her arms, going over the side. They seemed to make their own light—the child did. His hair was bright almost like flame. His face—I never saw—"

Here he stopped a moment, as if the memory were too blinding to be borne.

"I heard a woman say—it wasn't as if she was afraid, but only awed and wondering—'Don't let them go there into that island in the dark. Don't let them go!' And somebody else said:

"'Hush!'

"I jumped to the rail and looked over, and I got a glimpse—I swear I did—of a boat full of blacks and the stern seat vacant for a passenger. And the boat moved away, and there was a light in it there hadn't been before. It was bright, like the baby's hair. We put on steam again, and that was all."

Nobody spoke for a while, and the steward, perking out the curtains at the port-holes, to give himself

pretence for lingering while our talk shut down, ventured to look at us imploringly, like a tired clock striking the hour. The parasite man began to feel his way cautiously through a sentence, evidently not knowing where he was to come out.

"It's your theory, is it, that—that the spirit of those on board ship delayed—well, it's absurd to say it—stopped the machinery?"

The William Morris man nodded.

"When you put in that way," he owned, "of course there's nothing for it but to laugh. But there were evil passions aboard that ship, envy, pride, covetousness, lust, hate—chiefly hate. Now if you should ask me if hate could stop an engine, I should say, 'No, it can't,' and so would you. Still, the hate was there and the engine stopped."

"Ah!" This was a breath in unison from us all, not a breath of understanding, but of concurrence. The scion of a noble stock, who'd been cooling off a little, got on his wobbly pins and stretched himself cautiously, with regard to equipoise.

"Look here, old chap," said he, "I've heard that story before."

The William Morris man was too much absorbed in the after-tang of his renewed memory of it to notice who spoke, or he wouldn't have answered. Nobody answered the Sidney man.

"Not likely," said he. He spoke briefly, absently. "None of us who were there were likely to tell it. I never told it before in my life."

"But I've heard it," said the little poet.

"Have you?'" asked the William Morris man.

He looked up at him and spoke as if in that quarter something might be doing. "Have you?"

"Yes," said the little poet. His eyes shone. His hair seemed to bristle and come alive with some new excitement under his poll. "Oh yes, I've heard it."

"When d' you hear it?"

"Long ago—oh, long ago!"

"Who told you?"

"A man named Coleridge. He called it 'The Ancient Mariner'".

THE FLIGHT OF THE MOUSE

WE were at Darjheeling, Harry Chiltern and I, he doing some heavy sentimentalizing because that was indicated by the social atmosphere, and fancying he was about to rake in an occasional order for a portrait, and I, as a newspaper man temporarily retired, snuffing round for material. I had a theory that some of these too civilized and much worn quarters of the globe were not explored to exhaustion by the fellows who had already made their bold rubricated mark, and I thought there might even be a pocket or two at Darjheeling where a cleverish penman could strike it rich. Besides, I wanted to write an article on Kipling's India, and I never can ogle any place to advantage if I just go out with my hands in my pockets and saunter over it. I need to have an ostensible purpose, like the ladies who can't walk a brisk mile without a hank of embroidery cotton at the end of it, and then they can foot it all day.

We were a little bored at last, Chiltern and I, he with the discovery that Mrs. Hauksbee is no better than her type (and the type is common enough, none older), once the gilding wears off, and I discerning that I wasn't squeezing very much juice out of an orange that had been punctured before, when Florence De Lisle came up from Calcutta with her most respectable uncle and aunt, and the very best of introductions to

the reigning dames. Florence De Lisle wasn't her name. It was a New England name that has considered itself sacred for a long time, as measured by New England, and wouldn't have allowed Krishna or a drove of sacred cows to take precedence of it. But we soon had no use for her name, because we at once christened her, at a mess dinner, where she was mentioned with respectful anticipation, the Mouse, and the Mouse she continued to be among the entirely idolizing circle where, in the teeth of Mrs. Hauksbee, she took up an innocent reign. She was very beautiful, slender as a wand, with a hand like a lily, a pale face inside the particular oval that makes you think of unattainable things, the pointed chin of a Reynolds angel, great brown eyes, and coils of the palest fine blonde hair. It was by chance that any of us knew the color of her eyes. We weren't allowed to see them, for she had, for purposes of mysterious concealment, full white lids, the kind Raphael set the fashion of, and a set of eyelashes long enough to fringe a cloak. There got to be bets, at last, as to the actual color of her eyes, and the number of times a fellow could wile them out of covert. She wasn't using them for their legitimate purpose of hiding and seeking. She looked just innocence, plain innocence and shyness, as if she actually hadn't the grit to meet a world as coarse and head-strong as she'd found everything beyond the shrine of her white arms. As soon as we saw her we knew she was the Mouse, though some drivelled awhile, after St. Bottle had passed, about moonbeams and angels; and we set about wondering what, beyond maiden meditation, had so suppressed her. In spite of her slenderness, she looked athletic, a

girl who had some go in her and, to me, the once or twice when I dashed into the bower of her shaded eyes, perhaps unrecognized, untamed desires. Something had subdued her, something kept her veiled.

"I know," said Chiltern one night after he had danced with her twice and been ready to square off at the rest of us for a third, until her uncle came up with reënforcements of orders from the aunt (called irreverently and universally "Bellona"), and took her away, "it's that kangaroo of an uncle. It's that ambling pad of an aunt."

Now no terms could have been less accurately selected. The uncle and aunt were simply two very large, slow-moving persons, bounded on the north, east, south and west by prejudice of various colors. They were rather terrible, on the score of insularity, but they looked in no sense like tyrants.

"Oh, rot!" said I. The Indian night was irritating to me with its little circle of safety where we sat and cooled ourselves, and the jungles of manifold sorts beyond, jungles of hatred and tyranny and caprice, and a losing game where good Englishmen think they're dying for civilization, and are really the goods delivered to serve imperial greed. I was tired of it all. "Do you think they abuse her? Is that your idea?"

"I think they've built a little fence of privilege round her, and nobody's coming in unless he's got the mun."

"Well," said I, hatefully, "you haven't got it, Chilly, my boy. So don't do any more fluttering round the candle than you feel actually obliged to. It's hot, and —oh, what's the use!"

Chiltern got up and plunged across the room and

made himself hotter. I had the sense to keep still, and felt superior to him.

"It isn't all money," he growled out. "They're prospecting for family trees."

I was yawning my head off.

"I guess it's money fast enough," I said. "Don't get Fitch up here, that's all I say. And if he comes, don't tell me I haven't warned you."

"Fitch!" scoffed Chiltern. "Fitch!" And that was all he would say until two days afterward when Fitch actually came.

Now Fitch was a large, middle-aged bachelor of American birth, who wore a watch-chain draped in twin festoons across his semi-circular front, and looked, at every point, as though, if you should cut into him, you'd find cold suet. He was, I think, the most pestiferous bore, the most ponderous, untrammelled bore, that ever took it upon himself, in a massive way, to disgrace his country abroad. And he was incredibly rich. Chiltern had painted his portrait, turned him out a pompous ass in a style that seemed to please Fitch very well, and Fitch had rewarded him for it, and me because I happened to be chumming with Chiltern, by pursuing us, in a pathetic way (if you had any human feeling for such a semblance of life as he was), eating with us, drinking all round us, densely trying to make it worth our while by offering us a more luxurious line of travel than we could afford ourselves, or accept from any man, and most misguidedly gobbling up our jokes and laughing in the wrong key. We had escaped him at Calcutta, told him we were going to Benares, and fled, hot-foot, *remis velisque*, for Darj-

heeling. But we were never without a shudder at his approaching aura, and two days after we had evoked him by meddling with his name, he appeared like a fattened ghost at our sides—literally that, because he stepped in between us as we were entering the club.

"I began to have an idea you fellows were here," said he. "Been everywhere for you. Come along in and have tiffin with me."

We didn't want his precious tiffin; but seeing him there, we did find it necessary to talk to him. Chiltern began. He told him Darjheeling was infested with snakes and suttee. The suttees were being shot by the dozen with nine-inch maharajahs, and no man was safe. There was more to the same end, and Fitch stood and gazed at him out of his little pale eyes, and at the end remarked:

"Actually! When are you fellows going down?"

Chiltern told him gloomily that we meant to stay and die on the spot, because we were poor men and Darjheeling offered a field for our professional abilities; but he shouldn't advise any valued citizen with a bank account to do anything so absolutely suicidal and deadly. Fitch listened to him, with the unwinking stare that, as I always felt, meant an effort to understand which would, if measured in static units, have been sufficient to blow St. Peter's into the air and waft it over the Nile, and he said:

"Well, I guess I'm safe so long as you fellows are here. You know the ropes pretty well. When you think it's time to cut I'll go with you."

Chiltern groaned.

"Got a stitch?" old Proser asked him sympathet-

ically. "I've had a twinge or two myself, spite of the devilish heat."

"No," Chiltern told him, it wasn't rheumatism. It was snake-bite or a forerunner of cholera, he didn't know which. He thought he'd go back to the hotel and turn in. But just as he was getting off, and Fitch was handing him an affectionate good-by, Fitch happened to say, quite by chance it was:

"I see there are some folks here I know. I'll look 'em up, I guess—the De Lisles."

"The De Lisles!" Chiltern turned into a statue and glared at him, open-mouthed, and I felt I was glaring, too. We were humble with curiosity.

"Oh, yes," Fitch said. De Lisle and he were old acquaintances. Started in the cotton-mill together, and had a good many dealings, keeping prices on a level and hedging on strikes. Then he gave us his benignant, flat smile, like the dramatic effort of a garnished ham, and pottered away with that walk of his, as if both his feet were tender. Chiltern looked at me and I at him.

"Well," I said, "cheer up. He knows the Mouse already. He won't marry her, for if he was going to he could have done it before."

"Marry her!" hooted Chiltern. "He? Marry that——"

"Mouse," said I.

But the next day it looked as if nobody were going to marry the Mouse if Bellona and Bellona's bridegroom, as we quite seriously called them, could prevent it—nobody but one: for William Norman Pilkington Hare had arrived, an Englishman of long descent,

with manners, money, everything in his pocket, six-foot two, military carriage, fine blonde head, and a hand and foot to charm, and we saw, actually saw Bellona draw bead on him. It was at one of those foolish afternoon teas where the six young ladies then in Darjheeling who hunted in half-dozens, were displayed for sale, suitably chaperoned, and the mother of one of them came in towing young Hare, doubtless for home consumption. He took his cup of tea like a man, gazed all round with his clear blue eyes, and saw the Mouse. She wasn't one of the six, but her precious uncle and aunt contrived to have her look, as they always did, some way or other, as if she were sitting in a special coronation chair and as if her muslin dress had been made out of something mystic, wonderful. Hare's eyes dwelt on her for an instant, as the novels have it, and then he found Bellona at his elbow, saying in that cultivated patois of hers, half middle-class English, half Bostonese, that she'd met his aunt, Lady Sampleton, and how did Lady Sampleton do? Hare answered civilly, though without showing any warmth—as, indeed, how could he, for Chiltern, who had painted Lady Sampleton's portrait, said afterward she looked like a hickory nut dressed up in the show-feathers of a purple ostrich—and then presently he was being presented to the Mouse, and she was working all sorts of havoc with us who watched, by simply not looking at him. Then he was invited to dinner—we heard that—on the count of Lady Sampleton, and accepted, with some neutrality perhaps, but still he accepted; and Chiltern and I went away among the first, sulking like mad.

"At least," I said, when we were half-way back to the hotel, "it isn't Fitch."

"There are worse things than Fitch," said Chiltern, gloomily.

Whereupon I ventured to ask what they were.

"This Johnnie's worse," was his very elaborate reasoning, "because Fitch couldn't get her, and this fellow can."

I felt enamored of justice.

"He isn't a Johnnie," said I, "and it would be incorrect to call him a fellow. He is a very dukelike piece of handiwork, and we're nowhere beside him."

"You're right," said Chiltern, to my surprise. "We're nowhere beside him, especially in the eyes of Bellona."

The Psalmist says he has never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. In that regard I am more correctly informed than the Psalmist, for I have seen both; but the thing I have not seen is a campaign conducted with more circumspection and invincible purpose than the one whereby the De Lisles set a gin for the feet of the dukelike Hare, and limed his pathway, and threw salt upon his shining feathers. Every device known to the hunter of men they used simultaneously and in due order, and it would have been strange if such a mobilization of force had come to naught. One ally was lacking to them—the Mouse herself. She grew every day paler, more spiritualized, and sometimes we went mad with the impulse to champion her, and again we dashed our impotent heads against the walls of impalpable authority wherein she lived.

"Would you marry her, Chiltern?" I cried. "Would you do it?"

"Would I?" he roared at me. "Would I drink up Eisel when I've got an immortal thirst on me? Would I?"

"Then why don't you dash in and marry her out of hand?"

"Why don't I? Because I can't get within sight of her eyelashes with that brace of watch-dogs guarding her. I can't find out whether she's ever seen me, even. Sometimes I think she isn't a real girl. She's a wraith, a mist maiden. She'll melt if you touch her. Only we can't touch her, and she never'll melt. Why don't I dash in? Why don't I dash into the czar's bedchamber and clap him on the back and offer him a dimitrino? Why don't I dash into the jungle and pull the tiger king's tail?"

This was, of course, hysteria, but at the same time truth. It was also true that we all looked on at the game, and we all, I think, understood. So far as matrimonial desirability went, Hare was a prince of the blood. He brought his reputation with him. All the dowagers knew about him in some mysterious way, as news filters about among savages. They haven't the telephone, but all the same they get hold of things. You can't say how it goes, but information—and as a rule very accurate—is simply there. So it was with these Amazons of a thousand ballrooms. They even knew what advances he'd resisted, not like a cad, but through honest flight once he'd felt the lariat flinging nearer, and they all smiled when they saw America, within the brocaded surface of this New England

dame, walk into the arena, throw down the same old glove, and dare him to the immemorial combat. Only it was apparently not the same challenge at all. Bellona was clever, infernally. After that one invitation to dine, instead of pursuing, she kept her ground. And she absolutely seemed to be defending the Mouse, defending her from him, so that whoever took the girl out to dinner, he never did. There were always reams of table linen between them. And once when the Mouse had promised him a dance, Bellona actually sailed down on them and quashed it with the fiat that dear Florence was already overtired. The Englishman's eyes flashed—I saw that—and next day two matrons, by actual count, told Chiltern, who groaned it out to me, that Hare had applied for an interview with Bellona's bridegroom, and got it. And that very night the news swept over us like a special kind of plague that Hare had, in proper form, asked for the Mouse in marriage and been accepted. It was added that the marriage would be hastened, because he had had news that his elder brother, Lord Ormsby, was likely to be at Simla, by way of Bombay, and that Hare had been expected to join him. And then the date was actually set. They were to be married at Calcutta, invited there by Lady Sampleton's foster-niece.

When we heard that, Chiltern and I, we were at the club, trying to resist the culinary attentions of Fitch. The man who told us walked away, and Chiltern looked at me in a manner he has when one of his grand passions finds the earth caving in under it. His lip twitched as if it had been denied some draught, and he said:

"Well, it's over. Let's go home."

I was sorry for him in a measure, but I knew time and change would paint him a cheerful scarlet.

"Do you mean it?" I asked. "Home?"

"To America," said Chiltern.

We both forgot Fitch, who stood there, his little eyes fixed on us with that fatuous acquiescence he felt in our most commonplace acts, and especially our prowess in talking fool talk as he couldn't.

"Actually?" said Fitch. "I'll go with you."

Chiltern turned upon him with what I have heard called the courage of desperation.

"By the way," Fitch continued, "Flossie De Lisle's going to be married Wednesday. You wouldn't want to sail that same day, would you?"

Chiltern was looking him through, thinking.

"No," he said. "Put it off a couple of weeks, Fitch. Take the next boat."

"I'll engage passage," said Fitch, with alacrity. There was no porter's errand he wasn't anxious to do for the reward of being cheek by jowl with such bully boys as we.

"No," said Chiltern, "you engage your own passage, and I'll attend to ours. By-by, Fitch, see you soon. Got some painting to finish now."

"Painting?" said Fitch, abominably and offensively interested. "Got an order?"

"Yes," said Chiltern, "a group—a rajah and his brandy paunee."

"Sho!" said Fitch, who retained traces of his country breeding. "Actually! Well, do 'em justice, Chiltern, do 'em justice. By the way, Flossie De Lisle and her husband are going up to Simla."

"She hasn't any husband," growled Chiltern, "yet."

"No," said Fitch, with the cheerfulness of the adipose, "not yet."

It was Saturday, and I was on pins to go. I felt it was time to cut the whole connection, Fitch because we couldn't thole him, and the Mouse because Chiltern was motononously cherishing that idea of loving her. And because he cherished it, and because it was fighting in his system to a horrible extent, I was going to do exactly what he said about time and place, and let his sick fancy go wherever it felt it could heal itself.

"But it's not America, Pete," he said, as we turned away and knew Fitch was gingerly trotting off, as if the pavement scorched him, to engage his passage. "It's Egypt."

"Egypt? We stop in Egypt?"

"We do. We take next Wednesday's boat. We go to Cairo. We interrogate the Sphinx. We ask her what the devil she thinks of this business of upsetting a fellow's nerves because a girl's got a pale face and bright hair. Maybe we go on into the desert. And in two weeks Fitch takes the next boat and steams by us to England."

"Maybe he'll stop at Egypt, too."

"No, he won't. The day we leave here, we'll post him a passionate letter, saying I'm summoned to paint the Lord Mayor of London, and charge him, an he loves us, to meet us at the Mansion House six weeks ahead."

So he engaged passage under some fictitious name or other, I forgot what now, and we were to sail the very day of the marriage.

"Go on board at the last minute," I said. I had a foolish fear Fitch would lime us, and we should see him behind us on the deck. Chiltern's spirits were coming up. Blue water was calling him, and I saw he wasn't going to spend his precious tears on any incomparable she who could commit that last, worst solecism of accepting Another. He burst into his hoot of laughter. I hadn't heard it since he saw the Mouse first and began to wear a lover's melancholy.

"Fitch won't see us," he remarked, as if he had a pretty secret. "If he does, he won't know us. I've laid in some Mohammedan togs, for his sweet sake, and we're going on board in 'em and keep 'em on till she's under way."

"How do you know they'll let us? How do you know there isn't a prejudice against nagurs on the P. & O.?"

"Do you know who's captain of our boat?" asked Chiltern, with the air of delivering a clincher.

"No."

"Tommy Ridgway."

"Good! Will he stand for it?"

"Stand for anything we take it into our noddles to do."

So the day of the sailing we were on board early, each in a fancy-ball costume where I felt extremely foolish and somewhat parasitic, though Chiltern assured me he'd had the togs put through some cleansing process and strictly sterilized. We were on deck, he in a high state of enjoyment, and I contemplating going below and changing for Western wear, when he quieted suddenly, as if a thought had him by the throat.

"Well," he said, "it's over."

I stared at him from under my turban.

"Over?" I said.

"Yes. She's married."

"Oh, the Mouse! Yes," I said with philosophy, "she's married."

And then as I watched the turmoil of the shore, I saw a carriage drive up and two women get out, one of them veiled. The other was Florence De Lisle's rawboned, sallow maid. The first—I knew her through her gauze, knew her walk, her height, her slenderness—was Florence De Lisle herself. They ran up the gangway with the unmistakable air of flight and came on board. They were near enough to touch us. I grabbed Chiltern's arm, but there was no need. He was looking at her, shocked into silence. The two of them, mistress and maid, went to the rail and stood there. We swung off, and still they stood as if Calcutta held something they feared or loved to leave. I touched Chiltern again on the arm, and he followed me to our cabin. There we looked at each other.

"He must be on board," said Chiltern, voicing the thought of both of us.

"He's not. A bridegroom come on board and let his bride come after?"

"No!"

"She's run away?" I asked, almost, I believe, piteously in the extremity of my wonder.

"Yes. She hates him."

"Run away before the ceremony!"

"Yes. Good God! Peter, here she is on board with us for sixteen days of solitude and the open sea."

"Come back, Chiltern," I charged him. "Think

what you're saying. If she's run away from him, there'll be the devil's own row. There'd be row enough if she went alone. But we two are on board, and the world's wife will say she went with us."

He opened his mouth and looked at me as if he could roar down the hatefulness of it all.

"With you, at least," I said. "And that I stood by you, or indecently followed on."

Chiltern halted there looking down on his perfectly cleansed costume. Then his eye travelled over mine.

"We've got to keep these on," he said.

"The whole voyage?"

"Yes. I'll go and see Ridgway. I'll tell him we consider it a kind of a joke—Ridgway knows we're a pair of fools—oh, damn, Peter, damn!"

"You won't mention her?" I called after him.

"Mention her? I'm going to save her from being mentioned."

He was gone perhaps half an hour, and I sat on my bunk and meditated. I felt like a fool in my disguise which seemed well enough on shore, and in for an adventure all primary school folly and neither fun nor glory in it. When Chiltern came back he took his place beside me and also meditated. Then he came to himself.

"Well," said he, "how do you suppose they're registered?"

I couldn't guess, and he added, as if it capped the top of wonder:

"Mrs. Hare and maid."

"Then she's married." That was all that occurred to me to say. "Married and he's not here. Well,"

I mused, after another soggy moment, "she's run away. As you say, she hates him."

And I could see through the thin veil of Chiltern's quiet, moved only by a breathing like a racing tug, that he was wondering by chance whether there was a man she did not hate.

The tension of that sixteen days' voyage tires me now to think of. Mrs. Hare—the Mouse no longer—was going on to England; then, ten days out, she changed her mind, Ridgway said, and was going to stop off in Egypt. Chiltern and I kept our staterooms except after dark, and we made the deck our own for the greater part of the night. Even to Ridgway, we didn't own why we wanted our identities sealed as the grave. It was a bet, we told him, and then, in an exuberance of bitter fancy, a bet with Fitch, whom he also knew, that we couldn't or wouldn't travel incog. to Cairo.

Chiltern was torn in two by the aching wonder of it all. He pondered whether she perhaps guessed he was on board—nobody thought of the possibility of her loving *me*—or whether she was just flying for terror of what she'd left behind. He felt himself in the midst of an adventure beside which the tales of Scheherezade are as the babblings of Tupper, and yet, like a clear blue sky above his tragedy stage, was the unalterable determination in us both that a good girl should not be compromised. More than that, she should not fall into dangers unguessed by her, as they were as yet by us. Sometimes we didn't more than half trust the maid. She looked like a locked black morocco bag, for silence. What did she know, we wondered, or had she planned

the flight? Was the Mouse somehow in her power, and where was the Portmanteau taking her? They stayed in their own cabin a good deal, we found by chance from Ridgway, and it's safe to say the voyage was the stuffiest one the four of us had ever had. Then at last Cairo, and we followed them to Shepheard's and heard them make their bargain, with a good deal of dignity on the part of the Mouse, and saw them going to their rooms. We turned out incontinently upon that, though we had apparently been waiting till the English ladies should be served, went to a trustworthy dive Chiltern knew about, and there washed our faces and got into the dress of American men of respectable degree. Then we took rooms at the Hotel de Londres, opposite Shepheard's, and again forswore the air of heaven to sit at our windows and note whether or when our mysterious dames came forth. They did, and we followed them at a distance. The Mouse seemed interested in shops, timid about bargaining, but spirited and even happy. She walked differently, with her head up and a certain swing and go amazing to us. Her cheeks, so pale when we had watched her at Darjheeling, had the slightest flush. Whether she ever saw us or not, we could not tell. By that time we were worn and fractious with the queerness of it all, and sometimes there seemed to be no reason why she shouldn't see us. Only, if she did, there was a perfectly understood compact between us that no one should be recognized. But the growing change in her! Every day she seemed to be more buoyant, more intoxicated with something that looked like expectation.

"If this keeps on," said Chiltern one night from the darkness of his chamber where we sat together, "we shall forget she was the Mouse."

"So I thought," I answered, "though it's beyond me what to call her now."

"Me, too," he said, "unless it's the leopard."

"No, the leopard's cruel, when she likes. This girl's not cruel. Only she's alive at last—and wonderful."

"Yes," said Chiltern, sucking at his pipe. "She's wonderful."

So it went on for three weeks, a month, and then another night Chiltern came in to me with business written over him.

"Stir your stumps," he said. "They're going to the Pyramids by moonlight."

"How do you know?"

"Heard the order given. Walked into Shepheard's to ask fool questions and see whether they were in the garden, saw the maid come down, heard the carriage ordered."

"'They're going in a carriage'?'

"Yes."

"By themselves?"

"Apparently."

"I don't like that. They're safer in the tram."

"Well, you're going too, so you might as well like it."

"Oh, yes," I said absently, "of course I'm going myself, but I don't like that either. I wish we were all at Coney Island seeing the moving pictures—or down at Cuttyhunk."

So when the carriage came round to take the Mouse

and the Portmanteau out to the Pyramids the ancient kings seemed to have builded for the special purpose of a scene setting for all that was to do, two saddle-horses were waiting at our door, and after a suitable interval, Chiltern and I mounted and followed on behind like a particularly asinine branch of special police.

"I'm thinking," I said, while the leather creaked.

"What?" Chiltern flung at me.

"That somehow this night's the night that settles it."

"Yes." He bit the word off sharp. "It is."

"And I'm thinking if she does recognize you, and you forget Hare, you'll tell her how we've followed her. You'll tell her a good many things."

"I sha'n't forget Hare," said he savagely.

"Don't," I recommended.

If you're going to be in love, which, I contend, is a special curse only ameliorated by the inevitable oblivion at the end, there's no place to be in love like the country where Cleopatra wooed her Antony. Moonlight and the Pyramids, the avenue of lebbek trees, the Libyan hills beyond where we could see, and holding it all, like a sorceress with her lap full of sleepy runes, Egypt. Whole reams of poetry, stuff I hadn't thought of since I was twenty, came rushing into my head, and I swear I don't know to this day whether it was mine or Shakespeare's.

"If I speak," I said, and I knew I said it drunkenly, "I shall speak in verse."

Chiltern understood. He answered with a perfect gravity:

"Yes. Don't do it, though. We couldn't any of us bear it."

By that "any of us" I saw he included in our possible meeting, the woman in the carriage ahead.

We were riding slowly to keep well away, and suddenly we became aware, at the same moment, I think, of a mad rhythm of hoofs behind us. There was one man riding, riding like the wild huntsman at least.

"That's business," said Chiltern.

"Let him pass us," I threw back at him. "We can keep an eye on him and ride him down."

The rhythm of hoofs came nearer. The man rode with a reckless haste, and no eye for us, save to turn out. He was abreast of us. He passed, and we, by one impulse, started our horses into the same wild gallop and kept on with him.

"You saw!" Chiltern cried out to me.

"I saw," I answered, with, I think, as savage emphasis.

The man was Hare. He was still ahead of us, going like all possessed, and we doubled our pace. We were twenty feet behind him, and he at least twenty-five feet behind the carriage, and he now, as if this were exactly the distance he had determined upon, dropped into an easy trot, and we did the same. So there we were at an even pace, not to meet, it seemed, until we reached some point tacitly decreed, which was presumably the Pyramids. And now the Pyramid was looming up before us, a black bulk of velvet in the dark. Once only I spoke to Chiltern. I reined in beside him.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

He turned his head to me and I saw, or thought I saw, in the moonlight, that his eyes were bloodshot.

"It depends," he said. He was breathing short and hard. "If she hates him, kill him."

But I knew he wasn't armed—or thought I knew it—and wondered, in a dull way, what he would find to do the deed, and thought with distaste of the whole embroilment; and by and by we were there, and the monument of ages was looking majestically down on us and our midget passions. The Bedouins were wrangling for a big party of English that had come to see the Pyramids by moonlight, so that they forgot briefly to wrangle for us, and the English mamma was so exercised over finding at the last minute that Baedeker had implied the young ladies should wear divided skirts (which they had not provided), that she was forbidding them stridently to ascend at all, and that gave the Bedouins matter for more entreaty. In the little outside swirl of peace beside these tempestuous forces, the Mouse had alighted, given her driver an order, and with the Black Portmanteau turned aside to a remoter space where, it was evident, she meant to observe the Pyramids and the heavens for a moment by "the world forgot". While they did this, Hare sat his horse like a statue, watching them; but when it was fairly evident that this was what she meant to do, he flung himself out of the saddle, gave a Bedouin the bridle to hold, the act accompanied by a few terse words wherein I detected the name of the Prophet and "bakshish", and strode off after the Mouse. Chiltern threw himself off his horse, selected another Bedouin, repeated Hare's promise and potential curse, and gave him the bridle.

Then I did the same, nailing another son of Egypt, and Chiltern followed Hare and I followed Chiltern. And by the time we reached the man and woman, and halted at a distance of perhaps five paces, we both saw at the same instant that Hare had put out his hands and the Mouse had, with the quickest gesture of entire abandon, gripped them with hers. There they stood looking in each other's faces with a tense, drawn, spiritualized, perfectly happy look, and the moon Cleopatra saw when she fed upon Antony's face was shining on there in the old way, and the desert was whispering outside, and the goddess Hathor walked the sands that night and drenched us all, each with the particular philter conducing to his own especial madness. I had time for a look at the maid, the Black Portmanteau, and I saw she had really withdrawn herself, as if somehow this climax were what she had been expecting all along, and had prepared herself for as something it would be a part of her correct training to ignore. So she looked at the moon, and looked at the Pyramid, and thought, I doubted not, of some glorious *maître d'hotel* who had enslaved her heart in the course of her wanderings, and whom she would see no more. What was the odds, *maître d'hotel* or Chiltern, Hare or Antony? The moon knew all about it equally. While I thought these gibbering thoughts, Hare looked at his wife—oh, I knew it now!—and she looked straight at him. No more veiling of lids, no more retreating into the sanctuary of maidens-all-alone. They looked, and as if they adored each other and were sustained, exalted by what they saw. He spoke, in a rough, broken way that might have made you cry, if you were not, like

Chiltern, framed of jealous wonder and, like me, curiosity made man.

"Why?" the Englishman kept saying. "Why? Why?"

Then she answered him, in a voice all passionate pride.

"Why? Because I'd been thrown at you. They'd hunted you down and snared you."

"Why not have told me?" he raged. "If you were so proud, I'd have been humbler."

"I couldn't tell you," she said, and there she gave a sob. "I was ashamed."

"Ashamed?" That he said as if it broke his heart, too, that he should have to think it of her.

"Of my people, my country, myself. They'd kept me close till I'd died of cold. I'd withered into something I'm afraid to think of. They'd tried to sell me to other men with money, and one with a title, and I'd frozen them out, but you——"

She couldn't go on. No more could she look at him now. Her face turned away a little, and I thought, if it had been dawn instead of moonlight, he might have seen her forehead, even, deep with red. But this was the moment when he understood.

"Dearest," he said, just that one word, and she began to cry, softly, with no sobs or whimpering, only I was perfectly sure the tears were flowing down her cheeks.

"You ran away!" said Hare. He spoke as a very loving person does to a naughty child; and then the Mouse did something no one ever saw her do in the past days of her frozen girlhood. She laughed out long

and gay, a warm, bright flood, in the very face of the Pyramid and Egypt.

"I ran away," she said.

"What for?" asked Hare.

"For you to follow." This she said brazenly.

"What for? Why was I to follow?"

"Don't you know? So I could be courted and persuaded as girls ought to be, as an American girl has got to be. Oh, you don't know me yet! Wait till you know me, Englishman!"

We had none of us known her, I saw that; I heard it in her thrilling voice, the strength and will and passion it flung for all the airs of Egypt to carry to whatever ears they would. The Englishman straightened; a quiver ran through him. He accepted, I saw, all her unspoken challenges.

"Was I to meet you here?" he asked. That same dauntless thrill was in his voice, the one we heard in hers. "Was this intended? Does this content you?"

"Why?"

"Because if it doesn't I'll leave you here. You shall go on alone, and I'll follow for as long as you like, and as far as you like. And I'll kiss your footprints all the way."

That was doing pretty well for an Englishman, I thought, and then I remembered that Shakespeare wrote in English, and, for the matter of that, a man named Rossetti. She was answering.

"You were not to meet me here. It was to be longer, England, America, perhaps. But I got tired of waiting."

Her voice dropped. She had waited for him over one

steamer, and she was tired of waiting. And then Hare bent toward her in the face of Egypt and the haggling Bedouins, the skirted English daughters, the Pyramids and the moon, and she made haste to meet him, and they kissed each other, and Hare drew her into his arms and they may have kissed again. But I missed Chiltern from my side, and looked about for him. He was back there by the ruffling tourists, mounting his horse, and the Bedouin was examining the bakshish given him, and apparently thinking it a plenty, for he called upon the Prophet to rain honey upon Chiltern while at the same time, begging him to stay and climb the Pyramid, accompanying his remarks with some grotesque adjuration about Mark Twain. But Chiltern was riding off, and I got my horse in haste and rode after him, though to the tune of curses because my coin had been less abounding. Through the long, sluggish ride back to the hotel we did not speak; but that night I did gather from Chiltern that we were to leave Cairo next morning.

Next morning we did leave; and as we were going down the steps of the Hotel de Londres for the last time that trip, we came full upon a man and woman, she in the most beautiful clothes even an American bride ever clothed herself withal, yet simple as the sheath round a flower, and he with a bridegroom's proudest sovereignty written on him. This the Mouse? It was a creature with rose-mantled cheek and eyes that looked straight at you, rejoiceful, shining, with things promised in their depths that would take the happy bridegroom a thousand years to learn. She stopped, put out her hand to Chiltern, then to me.

She looked at us both, half tenderly, even half in whimsical confession, the sort where the mouth smiles and the brows are rueful.

"You've been awfully good," she said.

THE QUEENS OF ARCADY

HE was one of the most intrepid of our war correspondents, and his name was Mitchell. Something was being said about the creation of little imaginary kingdoms since the Prisoner of Zenda showed the way. One of us had smiled at the poverty of imagination visible in the efflorescence of multiple kingdoms, but it was somebody who had no more conception of the richness of cerebral life involved in even daring to infringe the Zenda copyright than he had of the force that goes to the bursting of buds in the spring.

"But you know," said Mitchell, "there really are those little kingdoms, rafts of 'em, if you're clever enough to hunt 'em down."

"You don't mean to tell me," said I, "that any inch of Europe lies there uncharted, waiting for your swashbuckling pen? That you can put out a careless finger, to the east presumably, somewhere round Bulgaria or Roumania, and hit a kingdom made to your hand?"

"Oh, but they exist," said he, with the irritating dogmatism of the man who has in his pocket the very fact that will floor you, meaning to conclude later whether to bring it out.

"Where?"

"Oh, lots of places: men's minds, if you like."

My triumph this,—but I was not allowed to score.

"I could tell you what happened in one of these same kingdoms."

"Same latitude, I dare say, round the corner from Roumania?"

"Not so far away. We'll call it the kingdom of Arcady. Good old name. Stands for illogical content, makes you lubricated and expectant at the start. I dropped in there because for five years there'd been the most eccentric goings on. King Solon—I'm making up names—he'd died, and his wife, Queen Ismia, in the minority of the young prince, Belphœbus, had been acting regent. The things that woman had done! To begin with, the king, some time before his death, had got up a report that a few of his former subjects living in the little province of Flos, nominally under the protection of the King of Altaria, were unjustly treated there. They were allowed to naturalize only after a residence of seven years. During that seven years they were ineligible for public office, and he called it a sin and a shame to leave them unchampioned. So he proposed to annex Flos—for purely philanthropic reasons, mind you,—and he did it. The Florians didn't make any resistance. They'd been indifferently miserable under the Altarians, and couldn't do much worse here."

"What did the King of Altaria say to it?"

"Oh, he did what a pig does at crucial points of pig history. He squealed. Because, you see, he knew the true inwardness."

"Paternal feeling?"

"Not for a minute. That was the second reason, made to wear outside. There's always a serviceable

reason hidden by the other, like a flannel petticoat under mother's black silk. The real reason was that the Florians had discovered quicksilver to an astounding extent. It was a good time to annex 'em. Also because Altaria was busy with a boundary war on her other border, with the Tellurians. I never felt sure Arcady and old Telluria hadn't hatched up the whole thing between themselves and shared the loot. Briefly, then, Flos became Arcadian."

"Wasn't there any row?" said I. "Didn't it stir up the tribunal at The Hague? I never heard—"

"You make me tired," said Mitchell. "When I tell you these things happened, if you're a polite person you won't pin me down and ask me fool questions. It hurts my professional feelings. Well, the first thing Queen Ismia did was to ask the Florians if they wanted to be given back. They deliberated. They'd developed a caution bump after untold experiences of frying-pan and fire, and they implied they'd wait and see how the regent behaved herself, and whether the prince was a good provider and the old ship of state didn't seem likely to careen too far. The queen was all there from the start. She shortened the hours of work for the silk spinners, and she built up the national theatre. And on Lady Day the girls from the silk mill would come to the palace, bales in hand, and present them toward the support of the theatre. They came crowned with garlands and sang national songs, old ones dug out of the past by a poet they had, and altogether it was a proud little festival. It brought tears to the eyes, if you'll permit the banality. And so it was with all trades. If workers wanted to give a little bit of extra

time, they were furnished with raw material, and they threw in the finished product toward the national theatre. So it was their theatre. See?"

I was irritating enough to ask here if he were a socialist, and he brought his complex capable hand down on the table.

"Now," said he, "don't accuse me of propaganda. I'm telling you what happened, that's all. And it happened. You'd better believe it. It was always my impression that the queen had shown all a woman's guile—a woman's in addition to a queen's, and you know a queen must have some instinct of statecraft even if she's only expected to bear princes. She's neighbor to it, so to speak, and snuffed it in with her breath. She had used her arsenal of persuasive weapons to convince the kingdom it wasn't she that brought about the kind, pretty, sanitary ways of government, but the prince. All through his minority she was weaving a magic carpet for him to ride straight into the affections of his people. And he had done that very thing. He was a fine upstanding fellow with honest eyes, but not tried at all as yet, not forced up against circumstance and made to take his leap or die in the ditch. My first sight of him was the day I pottered into the kingdom. I was in no particular hurry, and I wanted to go in just that way, walking, *rücksack* for luggage, to test the democratic feel of the place. I'd heard a lot about it, and if there was plenty of material lying round loose, I was going to write a book. Just as I was sitting down by the road side—there was an oleander hedge at my back—to eat my cheese sandwich, to give me heart to storm the castle, a young man went

by, clattery-bing, on a big gray horse. Two old road-menders saluted, and he returned it in a kind of gayety I liked; and then the road-menders, as if they couldn't contain their pride in him, turned to me and clacked, 'That's our prince.'"

"'Oh,' said I, blowing my sandwich (for microbes are no respecters of the dust of princes), 'where's his retinue?'"

"One of the old men was bent like a sickle, but he straightened up to something rather magnificent.

"'That's our prince,' said he. 'Our prince has no call for guards. We're Arcadians. He's Prince of Arcady.'

"But I turned, by the chance that is the inner direction of the mind, and saw in the field a running figure. It leaped ditches. It ran like a scarecrow made of sticks, and I even fancied scarecrow's rags were fluttering from its thin, swift legs.

"'Look at that,' said I. 'Is that going to head off your prince?'

"But the gaffer had gone back to his chronic apathy, and looked, open-mouthed, for a minute, and then fell to work at his stones. And I finished my sandwich, and tramped on into the town and up to the open castle gates. I had understood that in Arcady you might have free access to the prince and Queen Ismia, and indeed might claim shelter there so long as the bedrooms held out. There was a soldier at the gate, a sympathetic sort of fellow, and finding by my own word that I was an American on my travels, with a great desire to pay my respects, he passed me on, and another official did the same; and I was actually, toil-stained as I was from

my tramp and the prince's passing, led into the morning-room where the prince and his mother were at table like any simple folk. The signs of grandeur were in the hall itself, the wonderful lancet-windows, the cedars outside with centuries since Lebanon in their bones,—and, too, in the prince and his mother, the very cut of them. They looked mighty nice to me, that mother and son. She was a slim, small woman—yes, really little; there wasn't much to her except her royal manners—with lots of white hair, and he was the big lad I told you about. They wore the ancient costume of the country, and it fitted the lancet-windows like a glove. I was prepared for that. It had been one of her astounding clevernesses, though ascribed, of course, to the prince. They had thought it encouraging to national feeling, national industries, to return to the national dress. No head waiter's swallow-tail in his. No Parisian latest agony for the lady. The clothes were ready for a picture gallery, for grand opera. And they looked indestructible. I could believe they'd been laid away in cedar chests for longer than the prince had lived.

"The queen had my card beside her plate. She smiled at me and she looked very charming. I could see at once she was the sort of woman you want to pick a nosegay for, or lay down your cloak in the mud.

"'You have come on a gala day,' said she. 'We are going on pilgrimage. Will you join us?'

"The man had brought another plate—there was very informal service—and the prince motioned me to his right hand. And I sat down as I was, and wished I had not eaten the cheese sandwich."

"What language do they speak?" I asked.

"Oh, any language. There's an Arcadian patois something like German, but often they speak French."

"They knew who you were," said I. "They had your card. They wouldn't admit any obscure man to breakfast. You know that, Mitchell."

"Oh, go 'way," said Mitchell. "Go 'way wid yer blarney. Anyhow, I was there, and the queen was good to me. Well, I asked lots about Arcady, hinted at my book, and they were as right down cosey and sensible as you please. She, the queen, came to business at once, straight as a string. She told me what the prince had done to touch up the government and trim it with gimp and fancy lace, and how they'd gone a long way on the road before anybody got wind of it. They're such an inconsiderable kingdom, you see, in point of territory. Even you never heard of 'em."

"Mrs. Prig never did either," said I. "We 'don't believer there's no sich a person.'"

"Well, you pack your grip next summer, and I'll buy you a ticket and give you an elementary phrase-book and you see. But when the outlying continents did hear of the changes in Arcady, first they got gay. They said, 'Arcady's looking up.' Then they said it was comic opera. Then when they began to run over the tax list it made 'em sit up. But I'm giving you only the retail side of it. When breakfast was over, we three, the prince and the queen and me, plain American, we went out to walk on the terrace, and there was a sunken garden and a peacock strutting back and forth through a pleached alley, and there were flags on the towers. And the queen began to tell me what a festival it was

to-day: for you see, by luck, it was the day for the silk-weavers to come and bring their bales; and by George they did come, and a mighty pretty sight it was, girls walking two and two, holding up their bales as if they were shields with heroes on 'em, and everybody garlanded. And the girls sang: and the songs were all gentle, simple songs of sowing seed and reaping grain and blessing the apple-trees and thanking the good God. And then the queen asked me if I had ever heard of Erdreich, the poet, and I said I had, and knew a lot of his stuff by heart. You see Erdreich was one of those destined chaps that aren't perhaps discovered when the curtain goes up, but have an entrance that determines the course of the play. With all this revival of the ancient humble life, here was Erdreich, by God's luck, ready to snatch the old ballads out of time forgot, and put them in modern dress, just as simple, just as pure; and there were those, scholars and such, that said the revival of the ancient spirit of Arcady was just because Erdreich had taught the populace to sing peace and kindliness into themselves, and there was great bandying about of the old saw about caring not who made the history of the nation so somebody might make the songs. And this day, said the queen, she and the prince and certain of the royal household were going to ride to the home of Erdreich, perhaps ten miles out in the valley of the Arca, and pay their respects. His crowning would come later, and that would be official and the kingdom would take part. But this was only to show in what love they held him. The prince—always the prince!—had judged it best.

"While we were talking about Erdreich, a man came

out: I hesitate to say lackey. You see everybody had the same look of intentness on the business in hand and, if I may make a very subtle thing so definite, of love for Arcady. This man came out and gave the queen a written message, and she read it, and without changing a shade of expression, except that the red came into her cheeks, she gave it to the prince.

"'The King of Telluria!' said he, speaking out as impulsively as you might if you'd got a wire to say Aunt Sophy was imminent and you knew there was no custard pie. 'Coming here. Coming to-day, with a small retinue. What does it mean?'

"They were both troubled. I could see royalty wasn't in the habit of bearing down on 'em, even neighboring royalty. But the queen said quite sweetly, like a housekeeper caught making jam and putting a good face on her stained fingers, that the visit to Erdreich should be given up. And then, if you will believe me, I was offered a room at the palace, and they would send for my luggage."

"Because you were the distinguished Mitchell."

"Distinguished nothing. Because I was going to write a book about Arcady, and they wanted most tremendously to have it done. Already I thought I'd discovered something: that the queen prized Arcady almost as much as she prized the prince. As for him, I didn't know. He hadn't had his test.

"Now the rest of his story I am going to tell you as I had it afterward when I could braid the strands together. If you ask me why I knew this or that, or how I could have been in the room or in three places at once, I can't and sha'n't tell you. Ask a weaver how

he got that little thread of blue, when his blue had given out. Maybe he walked forty miles for it. Maybe he wrenched a flower off its stem and made a dye. My weaving is life, and you've got to accept the web as I toss it to you done."

"That's a bargain," said I. "Give us the web. All I ask is to see and handle."

"Good for you! Some things you've always got to take on trust, as that the doctor won't poison you, though he knows how, and that there isn't a bull in the pasture mixed up with the huckleberries. Well, the King of Telluria came, he and all his knights riding on fierce horses as if they'd been statues come to life. They'd taken train to the border and ridden the rest. I give you my word I could see just how they'd look if I'd had the formula for stiffening 'em into equestrian statues to be sold for public squares. The king was the regular old sort. If you'd painted him up, you could have tucked him into a pack of cards and nobody'd have known the difference. Now, I am an attentive student of modern affairs, and I knew what that quick breath of the prince meant when he heard they were coming. There had been newspaper nods and whispers about a match between the prince and the Princess Eda of Telluria, and if the prince had been a common Johnnie like you or me, he would have said, 'Mother, do you 'spose she's coming, too?' But living under the freeze of royal etiquette, all he could do was simply to say nothing and kick his princely self for a fool for hoping even for a minute that princesses could go round calling with their fathers unannounced.

"And the next entrance was the incredible one of

the Princess Eda herself. The king and his suit had been taken off to their rooms, and the prince had gone after them, and while the queen stood in the great hall thinking hard—perhaps about how she should guide the ship of state with these buccaneers bearing down on it—a slim young girl, with her yellow hair tied up tight under a veil, and her eyes obscured behind goggles, ran in and up to her, as if she knew just where she meant to go. And the queen started, and being a queen, though in Arcady, perhaps wondered whose head had got to come off for allowing even this butterfly invasion; but the princess held up a hand and said, 'Hush! hush!' and kissed her. And the Queen started and said, 'Eda, Eda! Why, Eda!' Then, just like any other mother, 'How glad he'll be!' But Eda made her understand at once that there was no man in it at all. She had come as wildly as the storm comes out of the north. She had to come. Why? She didn't know. All a girl's vague, wistful wonder under driving impulse shone out in her here. At least she wanted to set foot in Arcady. And she could never run away from home save when her father, too, was absent; and how often could you hope to find a king out of his kingdom? And she had impressed, kidnapped, terrorized old Bertelius, the librarian and her friend, and he and she had motored by the mountain road in terror of their lives, by cliff and chasm; because, you see (here her mouth smiled enchantingly), Bertelius was all afire about the young poet Erdreich. He had never hoped to see him; and now, if he was game, here was the chance.

"'You shall see Erdreich, both of you,' said the queen. 'It will be safest. If you stayed here you would

have to lie in hiding, and that's not—' She stopped and smiled, but the princess knew she meant not royal nor possible, and blushed a little because her adventure had perhaps proven her too bold. 'You shall go at once to Erdreich,' said the queen. 'His grandmother will be good to you.'

"'But—' said the princess. She looked most imploring. Queen Ismia understood. What the princess had really come for was not any wholesale adventure, not to let Bertelius meet the young poet, but to see the prince. Adventure, indeed, the adventure of meeting the prince, from the wings as you might say, while he was neither throwing over her the irised glamour of the spring pigeon nor carolling serenades. At this the queen kissed her. She smiled, too, and the princess blushed. 'Listen to me,' said the queen. 'We are going to-morrow at latest to pay our respects to Erdreich and his grandmother. You can be the little maid about the cottage. You can see and not be looked at, not be spoken to. Will that please you?'

"'But my father!' said the princess. Her eyes now were full of light and courage.

"'Would our good King of Telluria be likely to concern himself with kitchen wenches in cottages?' said the queen. 'No, child, he won't look at you.'

"So they kissed fervently like women in the armed truce of conspiracy, and the princess and old Bertelius set off, something to his disgust, on foot and the lady in borrowed clothes, for the poet's valley.

"Now that night it was apparent that something was happening in Arcady, a thing that never happened before. The king had come as his own envoy. He

wanted to talk it over, this business of privilege and land jobbings and the like, and he and the prince and Queen Ismia sat together on the terrace and looked at the moon. Enough to set you crazy, the moon of Arcady is. There are a great many lovers there. And the prince fixed his eyes on the black line of the Tellurian mountains over in the east, and remembered they were snow-covered and so a symbol of Eda and her cold virginity, and he sighed. But something waked him like a bomb that scatters and doesn't strike.

"'You're ridiculous, if you will permit me to say so,' old Telluria was remarking. 'You've got no army.'

"'Oh, yes, pardon me,' said the queen, precisely and bitingly. 'Every man in Arcady is prepared to defend her to the death.'

"'What with?—pitchforks, spades, and rakes?'

"'Pitchforks, if that's what they happen to have in their hands at the minute. Spades and rakes? Yes. They keep her men well fed.'

"'You've made no appropriation for the army since the late king died.'

"There was an implication here, and the queen heard it and broke two sticks of her fan in the good old way, and the prince, very wide awake now, felt his face grow hot. The implication was that this had been a sort of hand-to-mouth housekeeping woman's work, and not the old slam-bang immemorial style at all.

"'We have made appropriations,' said the queen. She sounded icier than the snow on the Tellurian mountains. 'But not for war. Do you know what we have done with our money?'

"He did know, but he grunted out a wholesale

repudiation of anything she could or might have done.

"'We've brought down the water from the mountains. It's in every man's dooryard. It flows through every man's vineyard, if he wants it. There are no droughts any more in Arcady: none that hurt us. Piping from the mountains costs a good bit, Cousin Telluria. Piping *on* the mountains used to be the fashion; but now we can do that with a good heart, because we've done the other piping, too.'

"She was rather a gay little queen, you see, and she'd got her blood up. She could afford to jolly him. After all, he was only old Telluria out of a pack of cards. But he was a man, too, and he knew the secret springs of man's vanity and cowardice better even than she, though she was wiser than women are. All through this talk he had the air of setting her aside because she was a woman and calling on the prince to support him in man's tradition. You know the recipe. When a woman cuts straight to the heart of things, you say to her in a fagged way, as if you'd been on deck since Adam, 'My dear, it isn't done that gait.' If she's bright and saucy she says, 'But it could be, and save the cost of miles of tape.' The queen knew her son was being inducted into the axioms of kingship, and her heart swelled and her throat choked and she could say nothing.

"'Did you know,' said the king,—he was addressing the prince openly now—'did you know those damned Florians had discovered gold?'

"Now there is no reason why the Florians should be damned except that they live in a rocky, ungrateful

spot where they are likely to come on metals that make them work very hard, sometimes underground, and rouse ill passions in the folks that don't have to work, but live in the light,—necessarily, you see, so it can set off the Florian diamonds. That's what the sun is for. The prince said No, he hadn't known it. His port was beginning to swell perceptibly and he, too, left his mother out of the talk. He'd begun to wonder whether he'd been breeched sufficiently early.

"'I knew it,' said the queen. But nobody listened.

"'I have a few fellows stationed there,' said the king, 'workmen ostensibly. They keep me informed, in cipher.'

"'I have some very good friends among the Florian workmen,' said the queen. 'They tell me what has happened without reserve.'

"'They're very close-mouthed,' said the king to the prince.

"'They talk to me very freely,' said the queen, 'because they know I shall keep their confidence.'

"'I don't care for those fellows,' said the king. 'They've given us all a good deal of trouble, first and last. Of course,' he went on, still to the prince, 'if it should happen that we formed any sort of alliance—' Here he stopped, and it was evident what alliance he meant. He meant Eda.

"The prince got very hot and choked a little, but he answered straight off, with a becoming dignity, 'As to that, sir, it is in your hands and in hers.'

"'In that case,' said the king, 'I should feel that we might work together in our ideas of Flos. But if you hand it back to Altaria—' Here he broke out and

wasn't kingly for a minute—'By the Lord, I never heard of such a thing. Passing a province over to—to—' He was so mad he sputtered.

"'To the power you filched it from,' said the queen. 'The chances are it will never happen, sir. We have left it to their option, and they are very loyal to us, very grateful.'

"'But in case it did go back to Altaria,' said the king, 'I might feel obliged to put out a restraining hand. You see, my subjects there don't have all the privileges I could wish——'

"'Years ago,' said the queen, 'when the late king annexed Flos, he used those very arguments. Yet, as everybody remembers, to our shame, that was the year the quicksilver was discovered.'

"'Ah!' said the king, suavely. He was stroking his kingly beard, and if it had been daylight it could probably have been seen that he looked greedy and very ugly. 'Ah, so it was.'

"'And this year,' said the queen, 'they have discovered gold. And this year you think of annexing Flos.'

"'They're troublesome neighbors,' said the king.

"'They're rich neighbors,' said the queen.

"'Well,' said the king to Belphœbus, as if this was a bargain between two. 'Think it over.'

"So they went to their royal couches, the king scornful of Arcady and its housekeeping, the prince in a state of aggrieved dignity toward his mother because she had been such a thriftless regent, and Queen Ismia holding her head so high you'd have thought she'd hardly see over her nose.

"Now the real part of my story is to come, so I'll scamp a little here and tell how the queen, in spite of this complication of her royal guest, pouring innuendo into the prince's ear about the good old ways of government, kept pressing the question of going to pay Erdreich, the poet, the royal respects. She had to, you see, it being a pact she'd made with Eda, who was probably at the cottage Erdreich, sweeping and dusting with strange implements, when she'd only been accustomed to riding-whips and golf-sticks. And perhaps, too, Eda was falling in love with the poet; for a poet in the hand is worth twoscore princes in the bush. So they set out on horseback, the queen very sweet and smiling because she'd got her way, and the king quite grumpy because this trailing of poets seemed to him a waste of time, and the prince also grumpy now he was making a point of doing everything the king did: just as a little boy at school copies the big boy, or even swaggers and smokes like father. It was a pretty ride down a cliff road into a green valley with the sound of water all the way."

"Did you go, too?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. On a very good nag the queen had ordered out for me. There wasn't much talk, and that of an incidental sort. But once I thought I caught a glimpse, in a path alongside ours, of the scarecrow I'd seen running that morning to head off the prince. And the old king saw him too, and reined up and called to everybody indiscriminately:

"'Secure that fellow!'

"But here the prince suddenly took a stand and was very princely.

"'I beg your pardon,' said he. 'I think I'd let him go. He's only a poor fellow just out of prison. He runs extraordinarily. He ran me down the other day—I was on horseback, too—to tell me how glad he was to get back to Arcady.'

"'Where'd he been?' fumed the king. I can see his old walrus mustaches bristling now. 'Where'd the fellow been?'

"The prince looked at him modestly, as if he'd really rather not say. Then he did answer, in a very low tone.

"'He was a Florian, sir, imprisoned for his attempt on the life of—my father.'

"'And he's out!' The old walrus needed an ice-floe to cool him now. 'You've let him out!'

"The prince was three-quarters turning to his mother. But she wouldn't help him. She wouldn't even hear.

"'We judged it best,' said the prince. He didn't stutter. He was clear and cool. I fancied he was thinking what mother would wish him to say. 'What he did, he did from his sense of awful injustice. We'd treated the Florians like the deuce, you know. And so—well, mother and I just let those prisoners out.'

"'Very well,' said the king. It was the way a Mauser would have spoken, if it could. 'If you and your mother are not blown up for your pains, it isn't because you don't deserve to be. And if I'm in it with you, sir, I'll never forgive you, by God, never.'

"But now the figure wasn't to be seen any more among the trees. I rather debated with myself whether I'd seen it at all.

"After we had ridden some nine miles, the valley opened out into a place that smiled, a circle of green a

good many acres wide, a place to be happy in, and there on the edge of the forest was a thatched cottage, all roses and pinks, and on the door-step, in a brown frock, and looking as if she had caught an enchanted dream by the tail-feather and couldn't believe in it yet, sat the Princess Eda, her hair braided in a pigtail down her back. We had been going softly on the green, but when she saw us she looked up frightened and stood there, held by the royal instinct not to fly, and yet with the fear of her father written all over her face. But he'd no thought of her, and the queen gave her a careless cold glance and said to her:

"'Go in, my good girl, and tell Erdreich and his mother their friends have come to visit them.'

"With that we dismounted, and the grooms that rode with us led the horses away to the shade; and out of the cottage came a beautiful old woman in the peasant dress of Arcady. Her hair was snow white, but thick and fine, as if it wasn't old at all, but some special kind of beautiful hair a young person as well might be glad to have. And she had pink cheeks and eyes bluer than anything, even blue flowers: for they've a surface, if it's only velvet, and here was liquid of a depth not to be plumbed. The old woman's eyes met the eyes of the queen. It was a strange look for a peasant and a queen to blend and take again. It seemed to ask and answer a question. 'Is all well?' asked the eyes of each, and the answer was, 'Not so very well.' But the queen did her part with a royal courtesy. They had come, she said, to see Erdreich. Was he at home? No, the old dame answered, with a careful deference, Erdreich was away on one of his stays in the forest. The queen knew

how he withdrew himself, from time to time, and sought out the foresters and old men too feeble now to do anything but tend cattle on the mountainside, and took down from their lips the stories and ballads of ancient Arcady. But the grandmother had heard his horn from the glade a mile farther on, by the brookside, and this was where he often lingered to make his poems to the sound of falling water. Now, before anybody else could get a chance, I very humbly and, I hope, not discourteously bowed before the queen—she was queen and woman, too, as well as regent; she liked the old customs of the bent knee and beseeching eyes—and asked permission to ride over to the glade and tell the poet he had guests at home. You see, I was dying to be in it, and I knew pretty well what the royal crowd here was likely to do: the queen to talk nicely to the old woman, the king to yawn his head off, because he didn't care a hoot for poetry, and the prince to hit his leg with his riding crop and wish he was at home trying on the crown. The queen gave me a smile. I have that smile now. I keep it by me.

"'By all means, go,' said she. 'We shall be indebted to you.'

"And I got my horse and rode away, and if I'd heard a jingle of any sort, even a couple of nickels in my pocket, I should have known I was a knight off on a quest to be remembered 'way through the twentieth century. The road roughened to a cart path, and the cart path ran impetuously into the forest, and got timid and narrowed until now the undergrowth brushed my horse's nose and closed against his flanks. And then it opened again, and there was daylight before me,

green between trunks of trees. And I rode on at a trot and came out on a clearing, all bluebells, and there was a woodman's hut, and Erdreich and Bertelius sat on a bench by the door, deep in talk. How did I know them? By their mugs, man. Bertelius is one of the most celebrated Dryasdusts in the world. His nose for a first edition is longer than Cyrano's, and more sensitive than Rover's. And don't you s'pose I'd seen a photograph of Erdreich, the poet, in the translated volumn of Miss de Smith, of Phœnix, Arizona? I halted, and tied my horse to a little beech-tree, and made myself known in rather more mediæval language than I use every day, as a messenger from the queen. Would Erdreich be pleased to come home and let royalty show him how inferior royalty thought itself, at this stage of the world's progress? I expected him to jump up, beg me to mount my horse, and let him, hand on flank, trot after me back again and so go tailing into notoriety. Nothing of the sort. He was very courteous, this young poet, very grave and unaffected, but he'd got some other bee in his bonnet besides the plaudits of royalty. It buzzed most horribly and scared the other one away. Bertelius took no manner of notice of me. In his eyes I was probably an outlander speaking indifferent Arcadian and not likely to understand a tithe of what he began to pour out in a rush, all of it adjurations to Erdreich to 'remember, remember.'"

"How did he look? Was he really an old man?"

"Is he, you mean. He's not dead yet. Bertelius—well, he looks absolutely and entirely as if you had made up a recipe for a librarian and had the finishing

touches put on by a costumer: long beard, eyes permanently in hiding, little cap, and a sort of monkish habit. And Erdreich was a very spectacular young person, handsomer than the prince, oh, far handsomer. I was glad Eda hadn't seen him first. He was all yellow hair and blue eyes, and strong as a forester: which he was, indeed, before he dropped into poetry. Now I took the cue old Bertelius thrust on me, and I stood there by my horse dull and dumb as a groom, and listening. (Do you ever think how much listening is done by the chaps that are hanging round to do things, the ones the novelists give 'impassive faces' to? You'd think their ears would grow by cocking.) And it's my long suit that I can understand any language you'll mention better than I speak it. So there you are. Bertelius and I might have been hobnobbing at a coffee *klatsch*, and he giving me his entire confidence and attention for all I lost.

"'You are a young man, Erdreich,' said he. 'Heed an old one.'

"Erdreich looked at him much as the prince had been looking at the King of Telluria, with the worship of the ignorant for the seasoned, the wistful gleam in the eye that says, 'If I knew what you do, how much better I could use it. I don't hanker after being you; but oh, how I want to know!' It's precisely like the puppy trotting round after the old sheep-killer. 'I won't kill sheep,' says the puppy's eye. 'Oh, no! but just let me come into the pasture and see you nab 'em.'

"'Your genius is buried here,' said Bertelius, and I could see he was Bertelius the tempter. 'All the best years of your life when you should have been writing

your splendid dramas, you have been wandering round the forest reviving old ballads.'

"'You know why,' said the poet. He looked, in spite of his fresh color, worn and worried, as if his day's excursion with Bertelius had been a sort of debauch. 'I wanted to write my dramas, but my grandmother told me—begged me—to collect the folk-songs first, because in a little time all the people that know them will be dead.'

"'Your grandmother!' said the man of books. It was pity in his tone; it was implication. 'Think,' it seemed to say, 'think, young poet, what you are telling me. You are saying that you allow the mammal who brought your mother and incidentally you into the world and provided you with food for a few years after, to settle the status of your most admirable and unusual brain. Think what you are saying. It is absurd.' Bertelius spoke significantly. 'This is a country,' said he, 'governed by women. Telluria is governed by a man.'

"The poet had flushed up a deep girlish pink. He began to justify his grandmother, justify himself.

"'She knew the way my genius—my tastes—went. My dramas were all for war.'

"'War,' said Bertelius, gravely, 'is a necessity, an ill necessity.'

"The poet's eyes began to glow.

"'But she says,' he began, and then apologized. 'Grandmother is very wise.' Bertelius bowed benignantly. 'She says the mind of the people inflames so easily. They can't bear dramas of war, she says. Give them the old legends of honor, of reaping and

sowing, of hunger and thirst that the children may be fed. Give them those, she says, and teach them to look on war as an insane fury.'

"Bertelius bowed again. His delicate mouth curled up a little at the corners.

"'Very amiable,' said he, 'very feminine and sweet. Ladies are temperamentally timid. We won't discuss that. But let me urge you again to come to Telluria and revive our ballads for us.'

"'You said it was wasted time,' the poet fished up out of their talk.

"'Not if other things go with it. But in Telluria you would have time for the other things, your dramas, your glorious plays.'

"I saw the game. Dryasdust wanted the ballads of his own country dug out of oblivion, and this boy had the antiquary nose. The drama business was lagnappe, thrown in. It was time for me to fling a stone and make a ripple. I stepped forward. I spoke with the deepest respect.

"'Am I to tell her majesty,' I said, 'that her poet declines to come?'

"Erdreich was on his feet. He was pale now, white as Bertelius's beard. It was not the custom in Arcady, I could see, for Queen Ismia to be told it wasn't convenient.

"'I'll come,' said he, 'I'll come at once.' He turned to Bertelius. 'Shall I leave you, sir? Or will you come?'

"Old Bertelius had got out a black book and a pair of horn spectacles. The fire had died down in him, and he was fractious and hungry for the seclusion of the printed page.

"'Ay, ay,' said he. 'Go. Think it over. I'll come by and by.'

"So we left him there, and I, leading my horse—for the poet had refused to take it and let me follow—we made short work of the distance, and, quite silent and rather hot, came out on the cottage again. And there I could read at once the history of the time since I'd been gone, and read it from the two pictures there before me. The king and the prince were together pacing up and down before the door, the king soliloquizing and the prince giving ear. Just inside, by a window of plants, were the queen and the peasant grandmother, standing face to face, eye to eye, and very grave. The two groups were like hostile armies during truce. When we came up, the tension snapped, and the prince spoke to Erdreich very prettily as if he were a brother, telling him the queen was within. Would he go in and greet her? Erdreich, all a timid propriety, went in, and the other two followed, but I stood outside by the little window. I began to feel I was out of the picture, and I'd better be content with listening. Well, there were fine speeches, and the queen told Erdreich what a loyal subject he was, and told the king how valuable Erdreich was, and talked with her eyelids and brows to the prince to the effect that he was to say so too. But the old grandmother, if you please, without a look at anybody, got out a wheel and pulled it into the middle of the room and began to spin. Erdreich looked at her for a minute as if she had committed treason. The King of Telluria frowned; he seemed to challenge everybody to tell why he should have the impression that a peasant woman, almost invisible from her insig-

nificance, should be presuming to go on with sordid occupations under his royal eyes. Only Queen Ismia wasn't upset. She kept on talking to Erdreich and he looked flattered and dazed, and in a minute or two, as if they were going to play stagecoach, everybody sat down in a circle about the grandmother, and I saw Queen Ismia touch the old woman's glittering headdress. It was the ancient headgear of the Arcadian women, handed down from generation to generation, and worn on gala days. I could have sworn she didn't have it on when we came. Now the queen touched it and said in a kind of lulling, soothing cradle tone, 'It's very bright.'

"Well, I saw it was bright. And I grew abnormally conscious of the hum of the wheel, and something inside my ears kept saying, 'It's very bright. It's very bright.' But then something else further inside me said, 'You fool, you're a war correspondent, and you were at the explosion in Spain, and you've been 'most destroyed by a destroyer, and you didn't turn a hair. And you're outside the window, and what has got them hasn't got you. So keep your eye peeled, my boy, and you'll begin to understand something about the ins and outs of sovereignty.'

"For something had got 'em all, all but the two women. I began to think of them as the two queens now: for though Queen Ismia had on the plainest of black habits, she looked most awfully regal. And when I glanced at the old peasant woman and saw how inscrutable she was, as if she'd got some sort of power under her hand and was turning it on, bit by bit, bit by bit, but not too fast for fear the sheathing would

break, I could only think of her crown and how she, too, must be a kind of queen."

"What were the others doing, the three men?"

"They were asleep, and the old king was making horrible faces. It was the prince I watched most. I had an idea from the way the two queens looked at him that he was the centre of the play. He began to writhe and then to talk, wonderingly sometimes as if he spelled a lesson from a book too hard for him and sometimes violently.

"'We're not prepared.' That's what he called out first. 'We're not prepared.' Then he stopped a minute, as if he saw things and they told their story. 'But we couldn't be prepared,' said he. 'Nobody could be prepared for that. They're dropping on us from the clouds. They're dropping bombs. My God! my God! there's the theatre gone. There's the silk factory. The girls in there! Why, mother, they were girls, nothing but girls. And that's their blood.'

"The poet sat stark on a little stool, staring at the whirring wheel.

"'Do you think,' said he—it was the Lady Macbeth tone—'do you think roses would grow out of such blood as that?'

"The old king was seeing things. I've never made up my mind whether they all saw the same things, or different ones adapted to their grade and textbook. The old king gave a groan.

"'She need not have died,' said he. 'Eda needn't have died, she and her little son!'

"The peasant woman spoke.

"'It will happen,' said she, in a kind of monotonous

voice, as if she'd set it to the tune of the wheel. 'It will happen if you open the door. Your hand is on the latch. Shall you open the door?'

"And now it was Erdreich talking. He, too, sat under the same paralysis of horror, but his horror was at himself.

"'I called it doughty deeds,' said he, 'but it was blood. This war? This is the butcher's trade. Oh, horrible! blood! blood!'

"But after all it was the prince that told us most.

"'What do you see, Prince?' said the old peasant woman, in a steady tone, as if she was afraid to speak too loud. He might have been the watcher on the tower and she the soldier down below. The prince was trembling. I got uneasy as I looked at him. He behaved like a horse I'd seen shuddering with sunstroke.

"'It's all destroyed,' said he. 'The palace is destroyed. That wouldn't matter, though we did like the windows—mother, didn't we like the windows looking toward the west?—But the little houses down by the river, where the workmen went every night and played on their fiddles and dug in their gardens, they're all gone. They dropped explosives on them, and then the fire——'

"The old king roared out, 'Who's that?' and whether he meant he saw the same thing or not, I shall never know, but the prince answered him:

"'The prisoner! the prisoner that runs fast with something in his hand. That's an automatic rifle in his hand. He's coming to us—us—us—he'll blow us into powder.'

"I began to have a sensation in my head as if every-

body was a fool, and yet we'd been caught in a net and couldn't help it. And then the wheel stopped and the old woman got quietly up and set it aside and lifted off her head-dress and laid it on a shelf behind a curtain, and Queen Ismia was saying in an even, unhurried way, as if she'd been talking for the last half-hour, 'And so, Erdreich, we came to tell you how dear you are to the kingdom and to us.'

"And Erdreich opened his eyes and blinked them like a baby, and found at the same minute the queen was talking to him and he was sitting while she stood; and he got on his feet like lightning, stumbling a little, and stood there all afire with devotion and ready to get her the moon and seven stars if she wanted 'em. And the prince, too, opened his eyes, and he cried out in a wild voice:

"'Mother, mother! God save Arcady!' And then he looked straight to where Eda stood in the doorway in her borrowed dress. And he got up and made three steps across the room and said her name, 'Eda! Eda!' twice, with a kind of sob. And she sobbed, too, It was the prettiest sight I ever saw, those two young things all afire with love and youth, holding each other's hands and forgetting they weren't invisible.

"'How did you know me?' said Eda.

"'Of course I knew you, Eda,' said he. 'How did you know me?'

"'Oh, I've been peeping through the crack.'

"And they both laughed, and the king came awake, and gave a roaring 'Haw! haw!' Nobody seemed to wonder how anybody had got anywhere. They were just there, that's all.

"'Cousin,' said the old king. He was speaking to Queen Ismia. 'I like your way of doing things. You're a mighty fine housekeeper. You're a mighty fine mother. Why, a kingdom's only a bigger sort of household, after all. I believe if you and Altaria and I agreed on a sort of iron-clad treaty, we could all turn our war tax into something practical, as you've done. Roads we need, roads and schools. What say, cousin?'

"'We must consult the prince,' said she, as if statecraft wasn't a stitch she knew. 'And now shall we ride home again? There's a horse and a habit for Eda. I had them brought along.' And even then, if you'll believe me, nobody thought to say, 'How did Eda come here? And where's Bertelius? And is he going to sit a thousand years, like Merlin in the forest, with horn spectacles, and a black book?' You see, when you're happy because you've found the road to happiness, you're in a dream, and in a dream you don't need to know how anything is. It is, that's all.

"Oh, there's one other thing. I almost forgot it. When we were all on our horses, out between the trees comes the scarecrow man, like a slanting bamboo pole shot from a sling. And he'd something in his hand. It was a little thing: a flower, a blue flower, the *Campanula Arcadinensis*. Do you know where it grows in Arcady? It's at the feet of inaccessible cliffs in gorges it makes you dizzy to look into. And now it's Arcady's national flower. He pressed himself close to us, and held it up to the queen. She put out her hand to take it. I wish you could have seen her face. That was a queen.

"'For you, madam,' said he. His eyes were sad, wild, lonesome eyes—the eyes of a prisoner—but they were full of light. 'All the gems are yours, and all the flowers.'

"And she not only took the flower, that queen, she laid her hand on his ragged shoulder, and her eyes were full of tears."

He stopped.

"Well," said I, "what happened?"

"That's all."

"Did the prince marry Eda?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did the powers go to war?"

"Oh, dear me, no! Nobody went to war ever, after what they'd seen."

"Is Arcady in actual existence now?"

"Course it is, much as ever it was."

"What's the use, Mitchell," said I, "what *is* the use? You know this whole story is a part of your bluff."

"No, 'tisn't either. It's a part of my busy past. Didn't I tell you I saw it myself, *pars-magna-fuied* it? Well, if I didn't somebody told me. Who was it, now? Who was it told me? Come to think of it, was it the German Emperor, that day he said he'd written a comic opera and didn't know how to get his third act? You ask him, some time when it comes in just right."

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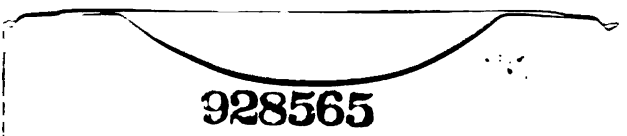

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